DOWN THE SKY

E. V. LUCAS

A list of the people of consequence in this book in the order of their importance begins and ends—according to the author—with Jenny Candover. And when one has finished these suave and leisurely pages, written with Lucas' own peculiar distinction and wit, one is inclined to agree with him that Jenny is an absolutely new and essential heroine. And to hope that Richard — when Jenny says "I should like to marry you, Richard"—will realize how lucky he is.

The London Saturday Review says: "Mr. Lucas squanders enough ideas to keep a less inventive author busy for weeks . . . A book to be read rather than reviewed."

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DOWN THE SKY

MR. LUCAS'S ENTERTAINMENTS

WINDFALL'S EVE
ADVISORY BEN
GENEVRA'S MONEY
ROSE AND ROSE
VERENA IN THE MIDST
THE VERMILION BOX
LANDMARKS
LISTENER'S LURE
MR. INGLESIDE
LONDON LAVENDER
OVER BEMERTON'S

DOWN THE SKY

AN ENTERTAINMENT

BY

E. V. LUCAS

" . . . how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent
him down the sky."

WILLIAM CORY.

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1930

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NOTICE

Should any of the characters in this book be identified with real persons the author would remain calm.

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A LIST OF THE PEOPLE OF CONSEQUENCE IN THIS BOOK IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

JENNY CANDOVER

DOWN THE SKY

'RICHARD,' said my friend Mrs. Candover—Jenny Candover—'will you give me two thousand pounds?'

'I'm afraid so,' I said, 'but what for?'

'I was thinking,' she said, 'of going into business.'

'What kind of business?' I inquired.

'I knew you'd ask that,' said Jenny. 'You're so cautious and inquisitive. All I want to know is, will you help?'

'But do I want you to go into business?' I asked. 'You're not a bit strong. Besides, you've had no experience. What kind of business are you thinking of?' I repeated. 'I suppose those who provide the money are entitled to know that. Or am I presuming too much?'

'Don't be pompous, Richard,' said Jenny. 'I know you love to hear yourself talking like a book, but it doesn't really suit you. Besides, we shan't want a

terrible lot of your old money, and if it goes, it goes. What's the sense of hoarding it?'

'I was merely putting forward the suggestion that I might be taken a little more into your confidence.'

'I thought perhaps you'd recommend something,' said Jenny meekly. 'You're so clever.'

Lying there, on her sofa, with her Pekinese in her lap and the usual new books scattered about, Mrs. Candover looked less like a commercial woman than anything you could imagine; but as her head was clear and her decisions were steady, and as she never said what she didn't mean, I knew only too well that go into business she would, and that I should find the capital.

'Among so many trades and callings,' I began, 'those that are suitable only for men we may dismiss at once.'

'Name some,' said Jenny with a note of challenge that was all too soon justified.

'There are not so many as once there were,' I admitted, after a little thought. 'Women have enormously widened their sphere. But tailors are

usually men; sailors always are, and so are professional cricketers.'

'Is that all you can think of?' Jenny asked.

'At the moment,' I said. 'It's extraordinary how women have come in. Everywhere. I suppose you were thinking of a hat shop?'

'No,' said Jenny.

'Antiques?'

'No.'

'Lampshades?'

'No.'

'Toy dogs?'

'No.'

'Tea.'

'You're getting warmer,' said Jenny. 'As a matter of fact I want to open a restaurant. With Doddles.'

Doddles, known to the postman as Miss Dora Fanshawe, was an old friend of Jenny's, with a private income and a far too experimental mind.

'We arranged it at lunch,' said Jenny, 'at a horrible place where we couldn't get served and the food was abominable. Also there were too many

A5214

things on the menu. Our restaurant—ours and yours—will specialize in two or three things only. Don't you think that's a good idea?'

'It depends,' I said. 'What things?'

'Well,' she said, 'chicken pie. There will always be chicken pie, hot and cold. All the year round. And baked potatoes. In their jackets. And baked apples; except in July, when we'll have strawberries and cream. What do you think?'

'But supposing,' I said, 'that people don't like chicken pie?'

'Every one does,' said Jenny. 'But if they don't, they'll stay away. If they don't want us, we don't want them. But most people are crazy about it, and we're going to give them only the best. I shall get the chickens from Captain Hill at Elstree. His eggs too.'

'Why eggs?' I asked.

'To put in the pies, of course. Hard boiled. I thought you knew things like that.'

'No soup?' I asked.

'No.'

'No fish?'

'No.'

'Anything to drink?'

'Doddles says that depends on the licence,' said Jenny. 'The best barley-water and the best still lemonade, anyway. Always. And tea and coffee. The licence doesn't matter so much, because it will only be for lunch. We shall close at three.'

'Can you make a place pay on lunch?' I asked.

'Doddles says so,' said Jenny.

'And what will you yourself do?' I asked.

'I shall arrange for the buying,' said Jenny, 'and engage the staff and be generally watchful in the background.'

'Every day from ten till four?' I asked.

'I suppose so. Aren't those the regular business hours?'

'And when will you see your hairdresser and your manicurist, and choose your library books and arrange for new clothes?' I asked.

'I must adapt myself, like other working people,' she said grandly. 'If I take a thing up, I go through with it.'

'And when you're ill?' I asked.

'I'm not going to be ill,' she said. 'Why should I be?'

'Because,' I said, 'you're not strong. People who aren't strong break down.'

'My will is strong,' she replied. 'Dear John' —dear John was Jenny's much-tried medical adviser—'says I live on it. And if I should now and then have to lie up, you would go down to the restaurant for me, wouldn't you, Richard, and take a hand?'

'No,' I said, 'I would not. I will do a great deal for you, but I will not mess about with other people's eating.'

'Then I shan't ever be ill,' said Jenny. 'That settles it. But I think you're wrong. It might be very amusing. But of course you hate novelty.'

This last gauntlet I refuse to pick up. Nor did I look at Jenny, who, I knew, was silently laughing. Instead, I asked with some sternness how Miss Fanshawe was to be occupied.

'If,' said Jenny, 'by Miss Fanshawe you mean my old friend Doddles, she will be occupied, as you

call it, in controlling the finances and superintending the restaurant itself.'

* * * *

'Two heads requiring profits,' I remarked, 'as well as the staff's wages, and the food, and the lighting, and the rent, and the advertising, and broken crockery to be paid for, to say nothing of interest on borrowed capital—doesn't this all sound very speculative, especially as neither you nor your friend'—I had never cared for Miss Fanshawe—'has had any experience?'

I don't say that Doddles was not amusing. She was, in her unscrupulous rattle-headed way. But I had never thought her a suitable or worthy companion for Jenny. For one thing, I disliked her addiction to betting, although, having acquired my own independence by winning the Calcutta Sweep, I was debarred from saying much on this theme. This, however, I could say: that the purchase of that lucky ticket was my first and last venture on the Turf, whereas Miss Fanshawe gave an hour every morning to the study of form and never

omitted to back such fancies as these investigations educed. It was the only use to which her not contemptible intellect was put.

There was no reason why she should not dissipate her own money in this way, although the pious, industrious and frugal father who left it to her must have been a very teetotum in his grave the while; but I disliked her persuading Jenny to put a bit on too, as she invariably did. Because Miss Fanshawe's forecast of a race, and the result of the race itself, too seldom coincided. She did not complain with any bitterness: she was a good loser; but she spared her friends no detail of the disaster and its cause.

'The going was too heavy,' she would say; 'I ought to have taken that into account.'

Or, 'The ground was much too hard.'

Or, 'Little Willie Woolly ought to have been riding him. How was I to know, here in London, that they had changed the jockeys?'

Or, 'I ought to have remembered that the distance was a bit long. The Fleetaway stock are only sprinters.'

Or, 'It was a bit too early in the season for one of Martingale's horses to win. He always comes on later.'

Or, 'The juggings was left at the post.'

Or, 'The poor thing was shut in on the railing.'

Or, and this was a too common explanation, 'There was something crooked somewhere.'

Whatever the reason, Doddles seemed to lose oftener than the law of average decrees; but she refused to be depressed or deterred from further experiment, and the few lucky coups that occurred, particularly when they were doubles, filled her with a new and abundant optimism.

—Such was Doddles, the suggested partner of my dear sensible Jenny and administrator of my spare cash.

'I don't think your tone at all encouraging,' said Jenny. 'Everything has to have a start. Look at the big stores and shops—they had to begin once, probably in a very small way, and as experiments too. There's a picture of Harrods' when it was like a rabbit-hutch. And look at it now—much too big for

me. I should like to know how they began all these big businesses, and on how little or how much money, and how the partners met each other. Where did Fortnum pick up Mason? for example. There ought to be a book about it.'

'All right,' I replied. 'And now as to site. Where did you think of finding the premises?'

'Somewhere just on the outskirts of a busy part,' said Jenny. 'Between Regent Street and Bond Street, for instance. Say Maddox Street, or Old Burlington Street or Clifford Street. Then we should get well-to-do business men and the people who are shopping.'

'A very expensive neighborhood,' I said. 'And the cost of making the place all ready would be terrific. Furthermore, you wouldn't get any regular customers: the very scheme excludes them. No matter how well-to-do a business man may be, he won't eat chicken pie for lunch five days a week. He'd be nauseated. And another thing,' I added, collecting arguments from the air, as conjurors gather coins, as I went along, for this is not my subject at all, 'if you are open only for lunch, you won't be

able to get proper assistants—they'll all have to be ladies who are prepared for part-time jobs.'

'I hate ladies,' said Jenny.

'You'll hate them more after a few weeks,' I said.

'You're very horrid,' said Jenny.

'I suppose you've chosen a name for it?' I asked.

'We are thinking of calling it just "The Chicken Pie." Or just "Jenny's." Wasn't there, years and years ago, a famous restaurant called "Jimmy's"? I seem to remember my brothers talking about it.'

'Was there not!' I said. 'I shouldn't care for your eating-house to be called "Jenny's."'

'Why not?'

'I shouldn't like all kinds of people to use your name so freely.'

'How sweet you are, Richard! I love to hear you say things like that.'

'It is extremely improbable,' I continued, 'that you will ever be mixed up with this absurd place at all, but if you are, it will be called "The Chicken Pie." Speaking personally, it's not in the least the kind of new restaurant I require. I should like a

cosy little place to be open also for dinners, with screens round the tables, to be called, say, "The Old Flames." Not in the least a place for the young; No music; no dancing. A total absence of the Little Brothers of the Ritz and their precocious girl friends wreathed in smoke. But a rendezvous for—well, for old flames, to sit on and on and be reminiscent in.'

'I suppose you'd be there every night,' said Jenny sarcastically.

'Only if you would go with me,' I replied.

'Richard,' she said, 'you're a darling. Because really I'm not an old flame of yours at all, am I? I'm terribly recent.'

'And persistent,' I added.

* * * *

At the moment when this desultory chronicle opens I was making use of my own flat, and Jenny was in a borrowed one in the Knightsbridge district. But for this enforced residence in London, there would have been none of the fever that leads to fantastic ventures. It was the lack of any rural tap-

root that provoked Jenny's restaurant project, for London spells unrest.

In the early spring we had been at Jenny's villa in the Alpes Martimes, the Mas St. Antoine, where Jenny would gladly live all the time were I willing to be so completely expatriated. But not even for her sake could I cut adrift from England and London; I had known them too long; I was too much their product, or perhaps too little the product of France. There are certain things about France which are unique and deeply exciting—such as the bitter-sweet pungency of its autumn leaves, the aroma of its roasting coffee-berries, the lucidity of its atmosphere under the wide skies—and there are French people who, if they wish, can suggest an atmosphere of the most charming friendliness; but these are not enough to turn me into an exile. France for occasional and rather brief sojourns, yes; but to live there and snap all English ties, no.

If Jenny did not feel like this, it was not that she was less patriotic, but that she was less indigenous. Always carrying her happiness with her, she merely

changed its background. Wherever she was, she made that place her own unmistakable abode. Even a wagon-lit compartment would in a few minutes, under her instructions and the strangely-willing gloved hands of the attendant, become a boudoir stamped with her personality.

With similar assistance from superficially-reluctant maids and disillusioned waiters, she could coerce the most intractable hotel sitting-room into, not of course comfort, but something far less repugnant than it had rejoiced to be. This meant congested passages and landings so long as our visits lasted, her first thought, on entering any room, being to have half the furniture taken away and the table moved into another position.

Should the table-cloth be of that heavy carpet-like material which some of the Dutch masters spent their lives in painting, she would herself buy a more simple substitute and leave it behind as a votive offering. Everything that she (or I) bought for the purpose of making hotel rooms more human was left behind.

I often wondered what the glib, respectful but

bewildered manageresses thought of it all, and how quickly after our departure they hastened to undo the good work and count the spoils.

Here was one of the many points of difference between Jenny and myself. No one could hate hotel furniture and decoration more than I, but nothing should I ever do to alter it. The perdoneums that refuse to give up their coal; the sideboards that have never cherished anything more genial than cruets, patent sauces and re-corked bottles of claret; the curtains that won't meet; the windows that won't open; the photogravures after Marcus Stone and E. Blair Leighton, the colour prints after Lance Thackeray and Cecil Aldin, all hanging irremediably crooked; the polished deal overmantels with painted vases on brackets; the handsome clocks that have stopped for ever; the armchairs, too heavy to shift, upholstered in a tenacious material that generates heat and irritation—these inevitable accompaniments of English hotels fill me with a dumb despair; but it remains dumb: I do nothing, knowing that on the morrow I shall have left them behind.

I am equally submissive when, ready for sleep, I realize that there is no reading-lamp and that once again the bell cannot be reached from the bed.

I refuse to be looked upon as a craven and poor-spirited creature because of this inactivity. I can make a row with any one. It is merely that, knowing how minds run in grooves, I accept the consequences. Innkeepers are innkeepers. If they changed their tactics and displayed imagination and taste, they would be innkeepers no longer: something more, or less.

What fun, I have often thought, to have a hotel and tell the truth! How it would spike the guns of the angry guests to agree with their indictments! 'Yes, you are right about the meat. We never buy anything but the cheapest frozen varieties. We are out entirely for profit.'

'The butter is as indifferent as you allege. That notice about it coming from our own farm is bunkum; it comes from the Waste Deposits Co.'

'Your complaint about the sheets is perfectly

justified: they are the cheapest coarse calico we could obtain.'

'Let me anticipate your parting remark by saying that I don't mind whether you come again or not. It is very difficult to harm a hotel, because we depend on guests who are here for one night only. Moreover you, thank goodness, are exceptional; most people have no critical sense whatever. Good morning.'

Jenny differed from me in her complete disregard of causes. Why things were wrong did not interest her. She looked only at effects and, if they discommoded her, rang bells until they were altered.

While these operations were in full blast, it was my habit to stroll gently forth and spy out the land. I had once a further duty, and that was to search for the nearest chemist in the hope of finding the bottle of Vichy without which Jenny could never be quite at home. 'Or Evian will do,' she would call out.

Vichy! Evian! The names of these two waters,

universal in France but so unfamiliar to the English country-side, must still be ringing in the ears of bewildered innkeepers throughout the southern counties.

'The lady,' I hear the chambermaid reporting, 'says she wants some water to drink. I can't make head or tail of it, she speaks so quick. It's either fizzy water or fishy water.'

'Fishy water,' I hear the landlady replying, 'she'll never get here, not while it's my inn, but take her a bottle of soda and a bottle of lemonade and see if she means that.'

Such a dialogue was constant in the days before good sense broke upon us and Hamblin the chauffeur always put a supply in the car before we started.

But Vichy was not all. Jenny was so unreasonable as to expect ice too.

And yet I doubt if the innkeepers were glad to see us go, for Jenny had a rectifying way that was very seducing. Moreover, it was not from fussiness that she had given trouble, but from a profound knowledge of what she wanted; and in a very fluffy

undecided world people can be respected for that. Furthermore, she tipped as she went along. Any unusual service, such as transporting a sofa to some temporary limbo, was instantly rewarded, without prejudice to the automatic tip later, at parting time. Those who can accept tips admire that.

Jenny's modifications had made the Mas St. Antoine not English but like herself; that is to say, less French than the French residences, but unlike any other of the many English-owned villas on the same hill-side. Its architecture forced a foreignness upon it, but once inside you found all the authentic signs that Mrs. Candover was the tenant. Flowers, books, long chairs, embroidery in the making, iced Vichy with lemon, and cushions, tablecloths and curtains of soft material in warm and soothing hues.

Her French Pekinese, Sum-Sin, as distinguished from her English Pekinese, No-Nose, who could not make the journey with her because of the quarantine restrictions on the way back, was a further mark of ownership. The French, being, for all their love of dogs, anarchists in the kennel, are not nor-

mally to be trusted with the care of English pets; yet such was Jenny's strength of will and purpose, that Sum-Sin, in spite of its mistress's long intervals of absence, remained faithful and slender.

* * * *

On returning to England for the English spring we had resumed our search for a new country abode; but in vain; and now that the autumn was on us we were idling in London: Jenny, as I have said, in a borrowed flat so intractable that not even she could subdue it to her own hue, and I in my old rooms, which I should never give up, but which would never again be anything but a dormitory and a letter-box.

Although we found no habitation, we made the discovery that in order to see this England of ours, outdoors and in, in its quieter, less invaded parts, there is, for the elderly, no means so effectual as house-hunting in a car. I say for the elderly because, of course, for those who are strong enough, walking must ever be the best way. The walker can stop; the walker can retrace his steps. Moreover the elderly perhaps have a slightly better chance

of controlling the chauffeur, or, if controlling is too strong a word, putting a check on his impulses. Hamblin, like all his tribe, began by driving entirely on the accelerator, but in course of time I modified that.

I remember old Sir Ezra Bullingdon, a recent knight, telling me how, when he had at last come safely to financial serenity and was able to take things easily, he and his wife started out on a three months' motor tour through Great Britain. 'We would see our own country at last,' he said, 'but,' he added sadly, 'all we saw was the shover's ears.'

I, however, had had some experience, with the result that I don't think I ever enjoyed my comfortable automatic income or my liberty from the desk so much as on the little expeditions which Jenny and I made from centres in the counties between Kent and Dorset, and then up to Wiltshire and Berkshire, in this fruitless search for our last home.

The procedure was very simple: first to decide on the district; then to collect from the local agents particulars of what was to be let there; then to take

rooms at an inn; and lastly, and most difficult, to get Hamblin to study the ordnance map.

Our first happy hunting ground lay south; but it might just as well have stretched from Essex and Suffolk in the east to Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire in the west. Wherever you go in England you still find old houses, unspoiled, in their own incomparable setting; you are still surprised at the diversity and immensity of this so-called little isle.

We began at Maidstone, where the Kentish Yeomen buy their agricultural implements and where so many of their hops are turned into the county's umber wine, and from Maidstone we progressed slowly, easily, luxuriously, and by zigzags north and south, in Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire, to Marlborough and Wantage, but nowhere found any inn so scrupulously managed as my old home-from-home, the Davenant Arms, and no host who had the pride of my old Boniface, Elijah Cubbage; yet we did well enough. There was, however, evidence everywhere that the motorist has had more influence on the ground floor than on the upper. Food is better and the wine-lists are

more varied than when we were drawn from inn to inn by the friend of man. Bedrooms, on the other hand, have not commensurably improved, and running water is still such a rarity as to be exultantly mentioned in advertisements.

Human nature does not, however, change, and even if some of our hosts and hostesses were slovenly or unimaginative, they usually provided a little entertainment, at any rate for me. For instance, one of the landlords with whom I talked far too much to please Jenny, who has not much patience with the past but enjoys the present and plans the future with extraordinary and increasing zest, was a retired music-hall singer, with whose memory mine coincided. He was a little man, with a ruddy nose honestly come by in the course of his new business, to take the place of its predecessors which had been the product of art. Gin-and-water was his steady tipple, but he showed no signs of incapacity: merely a friendly mistiness and a humid eye. The real work of the place, a very attractive old house in a Surrey village, as antithetical to a music-hall as could be devised, was done by his wife, a woman of

vast proportions and unfailing geniality. According to all the best traditions of fiction, drama and even of life itself, she should have snapped and nagged at her indolent, gossiping, and diminutive husband from dawn till midnight; but, on the contrary, she liked him, laughed at his jokes and refilled his glass. I should have enjoyed talking with her too, but she had no time.

There is no need to say that the word 'Ichabod' controlled our conversation, for among the reminiscent the glory has always departed.

'I don't go to music-halls now,' he said. 'In fact, I couldn't, because there are hardly any left and what there are are killed by the twice-nightly system and compulsory pub closing. Every one in a hurry. Why, when our turn was over we used to sit in the bar for hours, with our pals, and meet new friends. A few of the big pots, like Jimmie Fawn, and Charlie Godfrey and Dan Leno and Albert Chevalier and Little Tich, who could do two or three halls in an evening, had to be busy, of course, but the rest of us only did one and could take it easy and enjoy ourselves. But now it's a gallop for

every one and not a drop to drink after eleven o'clock. The world's gone to pieces.'

He sighed, emptied his glass and set it down with a bang.

Having taken the hint, I asked him if the new conditions had changed the character of the performers.

'I don't know much about that,' he said, 'because I don't know many of them now. But I hope not. They've always been famous for warm hearts and generosity. Look at the way they'll roll up for benefits. Look at their charitable institutions. We may have been a bit wild in my early days, but we weren't mean. Those of us who went under too soon were what is called our own worst enemies.'

His nose shone sympathetically.

'It's a strange life, a comic singer's,' he continued, 'and as different as can be from an actor's. An actor is part of a company, where all the performers are dovetailed together, so to speak, and get confidence from it. But a comic singer's got to do it all alone. It made you nervous, I can tell you, because every audience is different. Even in Lon-

don. The Bedford in Camden Town was different from Collins's at Islington, the Canterbury was different from the Mogul. And all were different from the Pavilion and the Oxford and the Troc. I'm talking of forty years ago, remember, when music-halls were music-halls, with more singing, except at the Empire and Alhambra, than anything else; long before the films came to ruin everything. You'll have one with me this time?' he inquired. 'Hey, miss!'

'And if,' he went on, after the girl had left us, 'the London audiences were different, what about the provinces, where they are rougher and throw things? Vegetables mostly, which don't matter too much because they can be soft; but bottles now and then. What about it when your songs are rotten? I've gone on, shaking like a leaf, again and again. Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, they're terrors up there, I can tell you, or used to be. But the real scorchers were at Glasgow. I don't say I was a coward, but I was careful enough not to risk my chances by answering back. But some of the swells used to let themselves be drawn. I remember Bessie

Bellwood—she was a fine woman, if you like—giving them what-for again and again. She was famous for her temper and her quickness, and they very naturally used to try to get her rattled. A splendid creature, one of the best, and no one's enemy but her own.'

'I remember her,' I said. 'I always thought of her as belonging to Shakespeare.'

'I know what you mean,' he said. 'And then there was Marie Lloyd, poor dear. She had a heart of gold, if you like. Twenty three carats, if there is such a thing. And one of the nicest men I knew was Chirgwin, the White-eyed Kaffir. Do you remember him?'

'Do I not?' I said. 'Why, I have even joined in the calls for "Blind Boy," although I preferred him when he was funny.'

'I was with him one Christmas in panto,' said my host. '*Red Riding Hood* I think, but I can't be sure. Anyway, he was the Baron and I was one of the servants. There were about thirty children in the show, nice little things, and do you know, Chirgwin took a hall for them on Sunday and gave

them all a treat and presents. A very curious man. They used to say he couldn't read or write and had to have the parts read over and over to him until he learned them. But he wasn't a fool, I can tell you. He put all his spare money into diamonds.'

'Did you know Dan Leno?' I asked.

'Not well,' he said. 'But of course I knew him. We were often in the bill together. There was no one like him. That was genius. Lots of us could be funny, but he was fun itself. Poor Dan, he had to pay for it, as they tell me genius always must. He was very near madness in many ways, all the time, and then he went clean off his head and died. Thought he was always receiving a "Royal Command." '

'Do you know a friend of mine, a singer called Posy Crystal?' I asked.

I was especially interested in this lady because, although twice his age, and more, she had been going to marry my nephew.

'Posy?' he said. 'I should think so. Why, she's stayed with us. And so you know her?'

'Yes,' I said. 'And I admire her very much.

She reminds me a little of Bessie Bellwood. Full-bosomed and generous-natured.'

'That's her,' he said. 'She's in Australia now. Mother!' he called, 'come here.'

His wife emerged from the neighbouring bar and towered above us.

'This gentleman knows Posy,' said her husband. 'What do you think of that?'

'Well, how strange!' said his wife. 'It's a very little world, isn't it? Pore thing, she had a great sorrow and broke all her English engagements and went off on a foreign tour. Some young spark got round her and then let her down, the blackguard. Or so we were told. Did you hear anything about it?'

'No,' I said firmly.

There are occasions when the truth becomes an imbecility.

* * * *

Our researches naturally took us into many houses, some empty, some still occupied but to be empty as soon as possible. I preferred the empty ones, because we could be alone—that is, as soon

as we could be disentangled from the agent's clerk or the caretaker: not always a simple operation—and because we were spared the pathetic eagerness of the tenants to find successors. People who want to leave their houses can be very persistent.

It is no exaggeration to say that most of the tenants who were proposing to vacate in order that we, or others, should succeed them, were disappointed chicken-breeders. It is obvious from the demand for pullets, fowls and eggs that poultry-farming in England must pay somewhere; but much as I have travelled up and down this isle I have never yet found a poultry-farmer who was prosperous or contented. Chickens, moreover, mean a certain unsightliness; they must have coops and runs and they lay waste the turf. To follow a poultry-farmer in a country-house is to be living down a wilderness for the first year.

But how pathetic some of these experimentalists were!—the husbands in their leggings, cramped for funds and spoiling for a real sportsman's life; the wives in blue overalls, over-working to keep

these silly birds in condition and lure them on to lay.

Eggs have lost all their savour, for me, since those wanderings.

There was that pretty young grass widow near Petersfield, with two children, struggling to make these cackling empty-headed creatures pay. But for our far-flung empire she would never have been a grass widow at all, but her husband, she told us, was in business in Ceylon as a planter, and, Ceylon not being good for the young, she was in England looking after their children and trying to turn an honest penny the while.

But the fight was too uneven; she could not cope with it and was going to give up housekeeping altogether and live in lodgings.

'I don't know whether you know Ceylon,' she said, 'but if you ever go there, this is my husband's address. He's the best of men—you can't think how I miss him.'

'When will he take his next leave?' I asked.

'He ought to be here now,' she said, 'but he

couldn't get away. Here's his latest portrait,' and she took from the mantelpiece a framed photograph of a man of about forty, good-humoured and moustached. Across it was written 'To my precious girl.'

'Should I ever be in Ceylon,' I said, 'I'll remember.'

* * * *

But not in all the four summer months could we find what we wanted. How can one decide where to settle, in this adorable England, even at the beginning of life? More difficult still when one has a mere handful of years to expect and is terrified of making a mistake. Driving, for instance, from Lewes to Horsham, I was convinced that I must spend my declining days in a house in sight of the South Downs, with the afternoon sun filling their hollows with purple; but later, when we came to Stockbridge and the vale of the Test, I was equally certain that all time would be wasted spent away from a trout stream.

Some day I think I must set down the record of that four months' divagating quest, for I find, on looking at the map, that almost every inch of the

road is marked in my mind as the scene of some incident or conversation or characteristic English feature, architectural or natural. It was, for instance, between Headcorn and Biddenden that we came on the lost child and carried it to the police-station. It was between Wych Cross and Maresfield that Hamblin suddenly realized he had lost one of the spare wheels and, slowly returning, had the extraordinary good fortune to see it calmly reposing beside the road, waiting to be fastened on again: a symmetrical occurrence which, had it happened in more primitive times, would surely have led to the erection of a shrine to a patron saint.

The places where we ransacked old curiosity shops could not be enumerated, Jenny's appetite for old china and old glass and Sheffield plate being unappeasable, while my eye was busy in the eternal and unrewarded search for a masterpiece of paint.

And then there, at Padgwick, lived the dear old parson who, finding us leaning on his gate while Hamblin changed a tyre, insisted on our lunching at the vicarage, where he lived in solitary state. There are occasions when the guest confers more

hospitality than the host, and I am sure, excellent as was the food, that this was one of them, for he had recently become a widower and his loneliness after all those years of companionship was a burden. His grief, however, did not dim his sense of humour, for he read us a letter of condolence (of which I kept a copy) from a young man, not so long since in his congregation but now removed to a big town, who wrote: 'I was very grieved to hear of the death of your wife, but as I only met her twice I can hardly be said to know her as well as you did, who have lived near her so long. But as I have recently lost my grandmother, I can, to a certain extent, enter into your feelings.'

'No letter that I received,' said the old man, 'did me so much good, for it made me laugh.'

The number of villages where I insisted on stopping in order to watch a cricket match were uncountable. Jenny, although she cared nothing for the game, was not resentful, as these lulls gave her an opportunity to sleep.

Once indeed I had to save her from a homicidal sixer hit by one of those lusty fellows with only one

pad who slog at everything. Nothing in my post-athletic life, not even the winning of the Calcutta Sweep, has given me such a thrill as finding the ball adhering to my hands. That was at Tilford, near Farnham, and I was the more proud of the triumph because I had remembered that Tilford was the home of the famous cricketer of a hundred years ago, William Beldham, or, as he was familiarly called, Silver Billy.

Mention of this phenomenal, and, had there been the right witnesses—it is melancholy to reflect how often Boswell is absent!—epoch-making and historic catch, only one degree less remarkable than that by G. F. Grace on the ropes at Lord's which dismissed Bonnor in the first Test Match, in 1880, reminds me that one of our hosts was a retired professional cricketer, of the same age as myself, and Jenny had, in consequence, the greatest difficulty in persuading me to move on to our next stopping place. For there is no talk so fascinating and unfinishable as talk about cricket, and old cricket for choice.

I found that in my distant boyhood, when pro-

fessionals' flannels were yellow, and some wore plaid or grey shirts, and some were bearded and all liked a glass, I had actually been present at matches in which he was taking part.

'I see county matches now whenever I can,' he said, 'but it's all very different. We had four balls and over, and men used to hit to leg, and some one stood at point. Now it's not till the last three or four men come in that any one hits—what I call hits—at all, and as for point, he's become scorer for all I know. And sober! Mind you, I don't want a man to make a beast of himself, but lots of the professionals of to-day might have come straight from the Y.M.C.A. When I think of Billy Barnes of Notts. . . . Well, there weren't so many matches then, and there weren't so many newspaper writers who know everything and can tell the captains what to do. County cricket's a business now.'

'Speaking of Notts,' I said, 'I remember seeing William Gunn cleaned bowled by little Walter Humphreys, and Gunn not using his bat at all. The wily "Punter," as they called him, bowled one of his lobs well on the leg side, two feet wide at least,

with his short cuff dangling down to hide his hand —how cross that used to make them!—and Gunn stood there just like a giant statue with no movement but to push his calves outwards to meet the ball. But the break was too much for him. The ball got round and down came his bails. You should have heard the roar from the Sussex crowd! "Punter" was not exactly a favourite, but he had the place in our hearts reserved for all artful little devils.'

'No,' said mine host, 'he wasn't a favourite with us either. He was a shoe-maker, you know, and first he used to bother us for custom, and then he used to dun us for the money. But he had wonderful control of the ball, wonderful.'

'Who would you call the best bowler of your time?' I asked.

'Take him all around,' he said, 'Alfred Shaw. He never tired and he never lost his length. And the ball used to come off the pitch much quicker than you were expecting, with a terrible lot of work still on it. He could drop it on a shilling twelve times out of twelve; gentlemen used to lay one down for him. He was wise too; and you can't help

being wise with a long nose like that; he watched the game like a captain. Late in his life he was taken up by Lord Sheffield, the one who was so keen about cricket, who fetched him to Sussex to coach for the Club and ended by making a friend of him. Couldn't do anything without Alfred Shaw. I remember Shaw telling me about how they went to the North Pole in his Lordship's yacht and played cricket there by the light of the midnight sun.'

'Using the Pole as a wicket, I suppose,' I suggested.

'Yes,' he said. 'Shaw told me about it. He played a bit for Sussex in those days, but what he did as a bowler he lost in the field. Couldn't get down to them. It's a mistake to go on too long, but it's a very sad day when one has to retire. One's at the same time too old and too young. Too old for games but too young and inexperienced and too fond of the excitement and applause to settle down to a new life. That's why—well, that accounts for some of the mishaps. I was lucky; I was able to succeed my father here.'

'Was he a cricketer too?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said. 'In his day. Round arm. He had played with Alfred Mynn and the old Nonpareil. He called us throwers.

'Talking about Shaw,' he resumed, 'reminds me that I used to like the Trent Bridge match the best of all our out-matches, because of the glee parties. The Notts professionals in my day were crazy about singing and they used to meet at Mordecai Sherwin's public-house and sing and sing like good 'uns. I don't suppose cricketers do that kind of thing now, except perhaps on the steamers when they go abroad. There wasn't any Bridge in my time, although we played Nap on railway journeys. Gunn was a great singer; so was Arthur Shrewsbury.

'Sherwin kept wicket, you remember, but the great day of his life, he used to tell us, was when he was put on to bowl at Lord's in the Middlesex and Notts match in 1892 to try and break up a terrible long stand between Mr. Webbe and Mr. Stoddart. I had the luck to be there. I ought to have been playing for my own county, but I was called as a witness in a case at the Law Courts. I remem-

ber how mad I was about it at the time, but how glad I was afterwards to have been able to get to Lord's in the late afternoon.

'It was a wonderful match, the way it went. Notts had made 466, of which Arthur Shrewsbury got 212 and Mr. Robinson 72. Then Middlesex went in, and as they only made 195 they had to follow on.

'It was just after their second innings began that I got to the ground, and things were going pretty well. Mr. T. C. O'Brien—as he was then, he became Sir Timothy later—was bringing off some of his own special late cuts and Mr. Stoddart was putting the thick of his bat behind the straight ones and driving them to long on and long off as only he could do. His back play could be wonderful! I remember one ball he had to play back to, hitting the Pavilion railings and rebounding forty yards. There's strength for you! Well, Mr. O'Brien left when he had made 57, but even then no one thought it could be anything but a drawn game. The score was 152 for five when Mr. Webbe came in and, as we say now, dug himself in, so that with only

half an hour's play left, Mr. Stoddart and he had added nearly another hundred, and Middlesex looked as safe as a bank.

'Then one of those surprising things happened which you have to go to a cricket match to see. The score was 244 for five when Mr. Robinson the Notts captain gave Mordecai the chance of his life. "Take off your pads," he said, "and see what you can do with the ball, and I'll keep wicket."

'Mordecai being only a stumper, none of the Middlesex crowd expected any trouble; so you can think what a shock they had when in his first over he clean bowled Mr. Webbe! Mr. Webbe had been defying Attewell and Shacklock for an hour, for 32, and the wicket-keeper got him! That's cricket all over. The ball looked simple enough, but it got off the pitch very sharp. Sheer luck!

'The crowd took it like one between the eyes. They were stunned. Nothing could be heard but a few stray Nottingham yells.

'Rawlin now came in. Imagine what the crowd felt when in the next over Attewell, who had been bowling all day like a book, without any luck, got

Mr. Stoddart leg before. Seven for 247. People began to look at their watches then, I can tell you. You could see in the hush every hand going to the waistcoat pocket for that purpose. Those were the days before wars and wrist-watches, you must remember.

'Three men to come in and ten minutes to go—ten minutes for Notts to get them out, ten minutes for the Middlesex tail to keep its end up. I was glad I wasn't one of the hairs of that tail.

'Mr. Thesiger—he's Lord Chelmsford now—took Mr. Stoddart's place and got a single off Attewell, which took him to the other end opposite Mordecai, and in the next over he watched him as though he was Spofforth and Lohmann rolled into one. Perhaps he took him too seriously and had better have had a whack, for after making two he was clean bowled.

'Then the few Nottinghamshire spectators turned Lord's into Trent Bridge, they yelled so, and the Londoners took out their watches again and never put them back. Eight for 250. Seven minutes to go and two wickets to fall.

'In came J. T. Hearne looking serious and dogged and as though this wasn't his job at all: his job was bowling. Meanwhile Rawlin was defending his wicket with the most laborious care, but with five and half minutes to go Attewell bowled him. Nine for 252. In came Mr. R. S. Lucas, who usually went in earlier, but West and Phillips, the ordinary last men, had begun the follow-on innings.

'Everything now depended on Jack Hearne and Mr. Lucas, who got a four off Sherwin right away. We couldn't breathe. It ought to have been a three or a one, to get him to Jack's end; but it was a four, and in the next over Attewell put down one a little on the off, Jack slashed at it and the whole eleven called "How's that?" It looked as though they had called too soon, for Mr. Robinson fumbled it. But before it could reach the ground he got it and the game was over!

'And so this most exciting match was lost and won by an innings, fourteen runs and four minutes, and I hope Mr. Robinson kept the ball as a souvenir; for it was more his match than any one's, in spite of the Shrewsbury and Stoddart big scores.

'I went into the players' box to shake Sherwin's hand and it was then they told me what Mr. Webbe had said when he got back to the Pavilion. "I feel," he said, "as if I'd been run over by a donkey-cart." Sherwin never forgot that. I've heard him tell the story of the match again and again, but the thing he was proud of was not his bowling success but Mr. Webbe's remark. "I feel as if I'd been run over by a donkey-cart," he said. That's rich! Those were the days,' he sighed.

'But when I think of that great match it is not only Mr. Webbe's joke that I remember, but the tragic end of the two greatest batsmen: Mr. Stoddart and Arthur Shrewsbury. It's odd how cricketers are often not very happy men. I suppose it's got something to do with the disappointments of the game—its glorious uncertainty, as they call it. Uncertainty can be very depressing as well as glorious and it makes men moody.

'So terribly chancy: a hundred one innings and our first ball the next. And the things that happen wrong that aren't your own fault, such as having catches dropped off your bowling and being run out

by the man you're in with. You've got to be a philosopher, I can tell you, to keep sweet. Wrong decisions by umpires have something to do with it too, and then the miserable hours spent waiting for the rain to stop or the wickets to dry.'

* * * *

For the most part we were alone in our inns, but now and then I knew a resident in the neighbourhood and invited him to dine with us. Such a one was my old friend Vestaby, the landscape painter, whom I extracted for the evening from his retirement at Fittleworth.

Thirty years ago Vestaby's work fetched very high prices, but new modes of brush-work, new fashions in taste, have come in, and to-day, at auctions, his pictures bring tens where they brought hundreds, and then are acquired only by the old, or by the simple and uncultured nouveau riche, to whom tender sunsets painted to resemble tender sunsets still have an appeal.

Vestaby had every right to be embittered, but in his conversation he made scarcely a reference to modern changes. We talked in fact of other things,

and by looking at the map I can recall almost everything that was said, especially as it was there that I first heard of Jenny's Lionel. Some reference to religious belief had occurred, leading to the mention of spiritualism, and it was then that Lionel made his entry.

'I don't believe in spiritualism,' said Jenny, 'and I have a horror of spiritualists and their literature. But I am convinced it is possible to have a guardian angel. At any rate I am convinced that I have one who is always looking after me. Of course I can't say for certain, but my belief is that it's a boy I was fond of when I was about nineteen. In fact we were practically engaged. He wasn't very exciting; for a soldier—he was a Sapper—he was rather serious; but I liked him and he adored me. He was sent out to India, and the next thing I heard was his death. Poor Lionel! Ever since then he's been taking care of me. Not in big ways, but little ones. He can't give me winners but he can forewarn me of a drop in the temperature and make me wear warmer clothes. That sort of thing.

'I'm thankful to Lionel all the time,' she con-

tinued. 'To give you an instance, the last time I was in London he put it into my head to take my cheque-book with me. It's a thing I never do; but on that morning I felt that I had to. And the result was that I was able to snap up a lovely model, greatly reduced, which I saw from the car in the window of a little shop in Curzon Street. It was the last day, for the woman's lease was up that evening. She'd promised to keep the dress for some one else until twelve o'clock, but they hadn't come, and at a quarter-past twelve it was mine. Lionel! Between him and St. Anthony I've had what may be called a charmed life.'

'How do you visualize this useful friend?' Vestaby asked. 'As the youth you knew or, now, as a contemporary?'

'Oh, as I knew him,' said Jenny. 'They don't grow older up there, do they? That's a horrid thought. But I don't think I think of myself as any older than when he was alive. I am older, of course, nearly forty years older, and I see lots of things differently, but I'm not conscious of my mind actually ageing. Are you?'

'So long as I could be in the presence of people senior to myself, whom I had known as a child,' said Vestaby, 'I thought of myself as a child. But they are all dead now. Directly the last one died, I grew up. But my mind, I should guess, was always humbler than yours.'

'I shouldn't like to be humble,' said Jenny.

'To return to this Lionel of yours,' said Vestaby, '—his existence and power for solicitude and warning, don't they make you a believer in another life?'

'I suppose they ought to,' said Jenny.

'Logically, of course, they should,' said Vestaby.

'I should hate to be logical,' said Jenny with a quick flick of her hand which in an instant of time removed every conscientious and scientific thinker from Socrates to Shaw.

'Do you believe in another life, Richard?' she said. 'I forget.'

'I see no reason to,' I replied, 'but I should like to think that we had at any rate one more chance to

return to this earth and see how much better we could do.'

'That presupposes the continuity of personality and reflecting power,' said Vestaby.

'Yes,' I said, 'I know. It's absurd, but then so is all talk about the next world. The sooner it's brought back to solid earth the better. I remember once, in the days when I lived out of London and had a season ticket, being in a carriage full of argumentative and speculative men. Something in the papers had started them discussing the future state, and each one expressed an opinion as to what and where that would be, all of them being sure there must be something (this was a long time ago) but adding that naturally it was a subject where only hope and vagueness could prevail; since we had no data we could merely state our feelings; but of course the investigations of the S.P.R., carried out by men of learning and deep seriousness, men with trained minds, could not be wholly disregarded; and so on.

'Then came the turn of a little silent man in the

corner, hiding behind his pipe—and I always think that his answer was a model—"And what do you say, Johnson," he was asked: "where are you going?" "I'm going to Paddington," he said.'

'You spoke of having a second time on earth in order to correct the errors of the first, or at any rate to make an effort to avoid the misfortunes of the first,' said Vestaby. 'But surely you yourself haven't need for many alterations. You've had a very easy time.'

'Possibly,' I said. 'But though I have often been happy I haven't been happy enough. If I am permitted another innings I shall ask to have a very different character and temperament. It is no use coming back again if one is not going to enjoy it. I shall ask to have all fastidiousness removed. I shall ask to be made tolerant of everything that I recoil from now. The popular press must be acceptable; I must welcome stunts and roar at comic strips. I must like indecencies on the stage and vulgarity on the films. I must neglect letter-writing and break promises. I must adore compromise.'

Vestaby sighed. 'Good Lord, yes!' he said.

'I have spent,' I continued, 'far too much time in protesting, in criticizing, in being punctual, in being honest; in short, in trying to play the game. Sheer selfishness: I did so in order to be on good terms with myself.'

'Nonsense, Richard!' said Jenny. 'You did it because you couldn't help it. It was your nature.'

'That makes it worse,' I said. 'Anyway, it is tragic but true that the older I get—the longer my experience grows—the more I am aware that virtue is its own reward (and then only when the virtuous have enough conceit), and that shoddiness, deception and treachery are not punished. The truly happy citizens of this world are slovens or wrong 'uns.'

'Now, Richard,' said Jenny, 'stop being superior and tell us the truth. Tell us what you would really choose to be if you could live again.'

'Pretty much as I am,' I said, 'but with enormous linguistic ability added. I should like to be able to talk with all the nations of the earth, wherever I met them, on the road, in the fields, in trains, in drinking places, in drawing-rooms. To

be confined to one language is a terrible handicap.'

'And you,' I added to Jenny, 'how would you like to be changed? Not at all, I guess.'

'No,' she said, 'not at all. But if God would give me a little more money I shouldn't object. He's no idea what a wonderful rich woman He missed in not making a rich woman of me.'

'And you,' I asked Vestaby. 'What would be the terms of your request?'

'Merely that I might have a perfect digestion,' he said. 'Nothing else matters.'

* * * *

We were silent for a while, each of us thinking, I imagine, of the darkness of the tomb unbroken by any such return to the light: a tomb where the sentence is not for death, which is nothing, but for eternity, an idea which cannot be realized but turns the blood cold.

Vestaby brought us back to the present moment. He began to laugh.

'Tell us,' I said.

He took another cigar, leaned back in his chair,

stroked his short white beard and smiled a far-away smile.

'What would you say,' he asked, 'if I told you that I, an old pagan artist with no god but beauty, was the cause of intense and moving religion in others? that, but for me, spending my last years in senile sloth and dyspeptic decay in Sussex, there would be in Italy far less piety—far less comforting faith—than there used to be? If you would go with me to a certain spot I could show you? Many a preacher of the gospel does not succeed in doing what I have done.'

'How odd!' I said. 'Why didn't you ever tell me this before?'

'Because,' he replied, 'I didn't know it till the other day. I discovered it when I was in Italy this last spring.'

'Italy in the spring,' murmured Jenny. 'How delicious!'

'Yes,' said the painter. 'In the sun. But what about the shade when the tramontana blows? I never thought to get back alive. Anyway I was

there, not to work but to renew old memories. I don't work any more. . . .'

He paused and his face grew melancholy.

'What was I going to tell you?' he asked.

'How wonderful your spiritual influence on others can be,' said Jenny. 'How you make them all better. I'm longing to hear.'

'You're a self-confident sceptical woman,' said the old R.A., 'and you rejoice in your naughtiness. I hope there's a specially hot little corner of Hell being prepared for you.'

Jenny shivered. 'I hope so too,' she said. 'Anything will be better than the cold, cold ground. But do tell us.'

'You won't interrupt?' he said.

'Of course I shall,' said Jenny. 'I always do.'

'But not too much,' he said. 'I implore.'

'No,' said Jenny, 'not too much.'

'Very well,' he said, 'the story begins fifty years ago, before most people were born. I personally was just twenty-two, free from the schools, full of energy and enthusiasm, tramping about with brushes and paints. Having done with Provence

I moved on to Italy, where a new supply of canvases awaited me, and on a certain evening I came to a little place in the mountains called Ileante.

'It was midsummer and the weather was perfect, and after dinner I went for a walk which brought me, quite late, to a villa, on the loggia of which I could see an easel with what looked like a half-finished picture on it.

'Presuming on the brotherhood of artists, I advanced to the house itself and climbed the steps, expecting to find the owner and have a crack with him. But there was no sign of life.

'I made a sound or two to indicate that I was there, but there was no response. So then I looked at the picture: a landscape more or less in my own manner but wretched in execution: the work obviously of a bungler or amateur.

'Without thinking what I was doing, I seized the palette, squeezed out some colours and set to work to finish and improve it. I had a fine bold hand in those days and was afraid of nothing. I was young. I was independent. I had painted for no rich patron; I had eaten no luxurious food.

'There was still light enough for the purpose if I worked like a demon, and I assure you that I did so. When I had put the last touches it was—I don't mind saying so: one needn't blush when praising an accomplishment fifty years later—it was magnificent.

'Then I walked off, went to bed, woke early, moved on to my next inn and forgot all about it. Once or twice since I may have wondered who the artist was and what became of him and of my contribution, but I never gave the matter any real thought.'

'How extraordinary!' said Jenny. 'If it had been me I should have asked the landlord all about him and later on have had some fun.'

'I suppose,' said Vestaby, 'I was too self-centred. Everything was fresh and romantic and I lost myself in the present. Yesterday had no existence.

'This last spring, however,' he resumed, 'when I was again in the same neighbourhood I had lunch at the very inn where I had slept all that long while ago. This time I approached it not on foot but in a

Fiat, and, to my astonishment, it was the same. Not the same landlord, of course, and there had been extensions and renovations; but it was still an inn. Sitting in the sun after lunch I took out my sketch-book and began to make notes in it, for although I no longer paint, I cannot lose the habit of jotting down such things as I, in my antiquated way, think beautiful.

'While I was doing this the landlord came out. "So the signor is an artist?" he said. I pleaded guilty. "In that case," he said, "might not the signor like to see the little church of St. Luke, the patron of artists, in the neighbourhood? All artists made a point of going there, although of course it was meant for the people as a whole."

' "I don't remember hearing about it when I was here before," I said.

' "No," he said. "It was not built then. It was built in the eighteen-eighties."

' "Oh, a new church!" I said, in the contemptuous tone with which, in Italy, we refer to anything of recent growth.

'"It could not have been built before," the landlord reprovingly pointed out, "because the miracle had not then happened."

'"A miracle?" I said.

'"Yes, a miracle, a most marvellous miracle," and he proceeded to tell me.

'It seems that, fifty years ago, there was living in a villa on the hill-side an artist, an Italian from the city, who was doing his best to earn a livelihood by his brush, but finding it very hard, as he wasn't very good. Having failed to sell any of his work in Florence, he had moved out into the country to concentrate on a chef-d'œuvre, but although he began many he could finish none. "Artists are like that," the landlord remarked, "is it not so? Or at any rate some artists; not the signor, of course; the signor, any one could see, has been successful."

'It seems that one evening the poor fellow in despair abandoned his picture on the loggia, went to bed early, and, after praying to St. Luke to strengthen his painting hand, fell into a deep sleep. Now comes the amazing thing—amazing, that is,

to those who do not believe, but an event natural enough, if not too common, in the lives of true Catholics. When he woke up the next morning and walked out to the loggia the picture was finished, and not only finished, but superbly finished: a masterpiece. A masterpiece and a miracle. The prayer had been answered; St. Luke himself——

'But here I forced the landlord to stop. "I can believe everything you have told me," I said, "but you must not spoil it by saying that it was St. Luke who added the completing touches, because I have seen St. Luke's paintings, in various places, in Rome and elsewhere, and they are all bad."

' "As you will," said the landlord, "but it was St. Luke to whom the artist addressed his prayer, and if you go to the church you can see the picture for yourself and perhaps revise your somewhat hasty judgment."

' "See the picture itself!" I cried.

' "Of course," he said. "You see, when the priest reported the case to the Vatican and the church was built and blessed and became a place of sanctity

and healing for thousands and thousands of pilgrims every year, the miraculous picture was set over the altar, where it is at this moment."'

'And did you see it?' Jenny asked.

'Did I see it?' said Vestaby, his face suddenly lighting up with an inspired glow. 'I should think I did. And jolly good it is, too. Better than anything I've ever painted since. And not only did I see my picture, but I saw people on their knees before it, making it an intermediary between their sinful selves and their Redeemer. What do you think about that?'

'And you?' he said, turning to me. 'What do you think about it?'

'God moves in a mysterious way,' I replied.

'What I want to know,' said Jenny. 'is what became of the wretched painter you had helped?'

'Oh, I asked about him,' said the R.A. 'He's dead now. He gave up painting and had a very successful career as an art critic.'

* * * *

Any one ignorant of the tenacity of purpose and the devotion to impulse which marked Mrs. Can-

dover would think that I had suggested enough drawbacks to the project of 'The Chicken Pie.' But having her mind set on starting an eating-house on sensible lines, she continued, and, in spite of my want of sympathy, seemed likely to continue, because it was not as if I was her sole financial support. Her friend Doddles, in spite of a lifetime of indiscreet investment and fruitless schemes, was still rich, still optimistic and still in need of occupation of a novel kind.

I lost, however, no opportunity of urging new arguments against the catering enterprise, not only because I was afraid for Jenny's health, but also because I actively disliked the business. To sit at the head of one's own table surrounded by carefully selected guests, for whom one has prepared something agreeable and unusual, is one of life's choicest pleasures, no matter what the cost. But to provide nourishment for the mob, to keep up the corporeal systems of strangers, even at a considerable profit, is very nearly disgusting. It looks as though the caterer also is born and not made.

Jenny, however, had no such views. It was not

her habit to analyse and destroy; she was a natural housekeeper, and she wanted employment for some of the leisure enforced upon her in London while she had no house to keep. The natural course was to house-keep vicariously; and that she was proposing to do. None of my hair-splitting male prejudices came into the case. London, in the West End, between 12.45 and 3 every afternoon, was full of faces that required feeding; faces fatigued either by buying or selling; and numerous as eating-places were, there were not enough to feed them. That was all that Jenny saw or wanted to see. One more place therefore should be opened, and in it she would have her first chance of correcting the many errors committed by her rivals.

Whenever we were in a restaurant at this time—and we ate together nowhere else—I examined the surroundings with new eyes, seeking new weapons of attack. I pointed out to Jenny how little she knew—how little I knew. When one eats in a restaurant, I pointed out to her, one is concerned only with the visible: the welcoming commissionaire, the smiling

proprietor or manager, the deferential head waiter, one's own waiter (although his visibility is sometimes not too good), the table and its fittings, the china, the glass, and the food and drink within them. All very jolly.—That is what one sees. But what, I then asked, of the unseen? There is where the trouble lies. Behind the scenes. The cooks cooking the food, the assistants dishing it up, the heaters of the plates, the washers of the plates, the cleaners of the cutlery, the polishers of the silver and the glass?

'It is too complicated,' I said. 'You can't begin to cope with it. It needs a practised hand, familiar with the whole routine.'

'But if we call in any one like that,' said Jenny, 'he'll be just a piece of machinery and go on opposing everything that is new and original in the scheme until it's no different from dozens of other places and therefore dull and useless.'

'I grant some of that,' I said, 'although reserving the deepest respect for your capacity for getting your own way. The expert, being a one-ideaed man,

is bound to be out of sympathy with experiments. But without some such advice behind you, you are doomed.'

—That is how our conversation used to run.

And then one night, in the wakeful small hours, when regret and remorse usually take command, I had an inspiration. I saw a way out. Compromise, that venerable well-tried solver of problems, should find the solution of yet one more.

* * * *

The next time that Doddles arrived with her estimates and lists of prices, I took the floor.

'I've been thinking about your plan rather seriously,' I said, 'and I see it's all wrong. It's bound to fail, because it's based on a fallacy. Your foundation-stone, the chicken pie, is wrong. Chicken pie is a delicacy, an event. It is not a normal dish; whereas the people you are catering for expect and want nothing but what is normal, can be obtained quickly and eaten quickly, so that they can get back to more shopping, or go to a matinée or the Pictures. Chicken pie is not a London dish; it is for the country. If you took a farmhouse or old

water-mill thirty to forty miles from town, just off a favourite motoring road, and served nothing but chicken pie, you might do well; but not in London. You have got the wrong idea.'

'Perhaps you will be coming to the point some day,' said Doddles. 'Telling us what's wrong is easy.'

'Patience,' I replied. 'I must develop this argument in my own way: clearly, step by step.'

'For Heaven's sake, Richard!' Jenny exclaimed.

'We come now to the right way,' I said. 'Instead of doing things for your customers in the ordinary manner, seating them at table and bringing them food, you must let them know that they must wait on themselves. That is the secret: they must wait on themselves.'

'Wait on themselves?' cried Doddles.

'The words are simple,' I replied, 'and have but one meaning.' (I never cared for this woman.)

'It requires thought,' she said, knitting her brows.

'What you want,' I went on quickly, 'is a long counter covered with sandwiches and simple things, all cold and all clearly priced, with table-money

extra to cover rolls and butter. Have that, but let them wait on themselves. That is the key to the situation. Call it "The Picnic" or "The Picnic Luncheon Room," call it whatever you like, but make them wait on themselves. That will excite them.'

'I believe the old devil's right,' said Doddles.

'I think so too.' said Jenny, 'but we should still need a staff.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but a very small one and no cook. You could probably get your ladies to do everything and thus eliminate the kitchen altogether. I was always afraid of the kitchen.'

'But is it worth going on with?' Jenny asked, in a tone in which regrets for the lost pie were distressingly audible.

'It's not so amusing as it was,' said Doddles. 'But it's much more likely to pay. I shall go on with it.'

'I don't see how it could need both of us,' said Jenny, to my great delight. 'It's too small a scheme and too simple, for two pompous proprietors to be in charge. If Richard would still support it, wouldn't you run it alone? You'd let Doddles have

the money just the same, Richard, wouldn't you?' she added to me.

'In proportion, yes,' I said. 'Much less will be required than your old pie was going to cost.'

'That's very handsome of you,' said Doddles. 'But you must both stick to me till we open. Won't you? I went into this entirely because of you, Candy, and without you I'm not me at all, I'm only a mutilated half.'

'That's all right,' said Jenny. 'And we must work very hard. You ought to be open for the Christmas shopping.'

'That will be easy,' said Doddles, 'because the place we were offered in Cork Street, which wasn't suitable for the bigger scheme, would do perfectly for this. "The Picnic Luncheon Rooms"—it's a wonderful idea.'

'You must have sandwich men to advertise it,' I said. 'Something like this:

'Lunch quickly, simply and cheaply,
at
THE PICNIC ROOMS.
"None but the brave deserve the Fare."'

'How delicious, Richard!' said Jenny. 'But could we say that?'

'Why not?'

'Well, doesn't it cut both ways? In my mind, though it's very funny, it calls up a scene of struggling lunchers each trying to be brave enough to secure a mouthful of anything.'

'Or heroic enough,' said Doddles, 'to be able to cope with such food.'

'How extraordinary!' I said. 'I thought it was just a good publicity joke. Very well then, I've got another suggestion, far better, because it's not only a well-known phrase but it describes the whole scheme of the restaurant.

'Lunch quickly, simply and cheaply
at
THE PICNIC ROOMS.
"The Gods help those who help themselves." '

'Splendid!' said Doddles.

'Richard,' said Jenny, 'you're often really rather clever.'

* * * *

As it happened, I need not have bothered to set up opposition to the restaurant scheme at all, because destiny had other ideas. How much wear and tear we should be saved if only we would cultivate fatalism! The stars had so arranged it that Jenny was never to risk her health in any such affair.

It was early in October that I was called to The Hague for two or three days, and although Jenny was urgent to accompany me I would not allow it. There were gales about and I did not think she looked well enough for the crossings.

I made all the haste I could and returned quickly. On entering my little lobby at midnight I was shocked to see a telegram on the hat-stand.

There are, I suppose, men, chief among them being bookmakers and, next, famous actors and actresses, so accustomed to telegrams that the sight of one carries no thrill. But try as I may, I cannot, even in my advanced maturity, see one without losing a beat. To be rung up on the telephone, although that means a summons from the unknown, is merely to be quickened into conjecture, not dis-

mayed or alarmed; but those brown envelopes have always begun by frightening and of course will now do so even more.

It was only three paces from the door to the hat-stand, but in taking them there was time for me to pass in review dozens of versions of the unread message. Chief among these was the right one: Jenny was ill.

'Mrs. Candover,' ran the words, signed by Meakin, her maid, 'in nursing home 55 Avelona Place W Portland 2329.'

Among my letters was one in Jenny's delicate yet strong impetuous hand written at this same Home.

'Darling Richard,' it galloped, 'don't be alarmed. Nothing serious, but something which has been troubling me for a long while must now be dealt with. I am so glad you were away when it happened, I always hoped you would be. Come and see me soon. J.'

Late though it was, I rang up Portland 2329 and learned from a drowsy attendant that Mrs. Candover had been operated on that day, that she

was going on quite well and my message should be given to her the first thing in the morning. These were typical Nursing Home assurances, but I considered them satisfactory enough to entitle me to try to sleep.

* * * *

Poor Jenny, always fragile, looked like nothing but a little ghost in her severe iron bed: but a very dainty ghost, with frilled shawl and coverings and coloured pillows that she had brought with her to chasten the austerity of the room.

She gave me a wan but radiant smile and the whitest and slenderest hand, but was unable to speak. She indicated, however, where my carnations were to be set, to the complete displacement and even obliteration of another votive vase, and then settled down to hear my news.

Jenny ought never to be ill. Vitality, vivacity, were of her essence. Lying there in bed, reduced by the knife to extreme weakness, the most living thing about her—impulse with its instantaneous reaction—was stilled.

In health, whatever she thought she either did

or said. She could now do nothing and her voice had gone. She could, however, listen, and was also just strong enough to hold up *The Times* to read her favourite column, the Deaths. With an almost transparent finger she was even able to point to the place—between the last of the Bs and, in the Cs, a deeply mourned retired Indian Civil servant who had passed away at Hove in his eighty-seventh year—where her own name would come. But I looked upon that grim jest as a hopeful sign. She beckoned me to come nearer and I could just make out her words: 'Many flowers, by request.'

* * * *

The next day she had rallied sufficiently to be able to talk.

'It's very unpleasant when you first come into a Nursing Home,' she said. 'They want to know the name and address of your next-of-kin and they ask if your teeth are your own, because if they are false you must surrender them before the operation begins. As it happens, my teeth are real enough; but why, if one is to die under the knife, one should not die with a tidy mouth, I cannot see. But that is the

medical profession all over—always wanting to exert authority.'

* * * *

Jenny while still living had so many flowers that, although I always brought a little bunch of violets to pin to her dressing-jacket, I concentrated on finding every day something in the way of a curiosity to bring her as well: usually a relic of the past, odd, or pretty or even, when one had luck, beautiful. Jenny being the best recipient of a gift that could be wished for, I enjoyed the search, the presentation and the thanks.

Shops for the sale of what are called antiques are to be found everywhere in London, but latterly there has been a tendency to centralize them, just as doctors are centralized in and about Harley Street, and tailors in and about Savile Row, and picture-dealers not too far from Christie's. The principal district for antiques at the moment comprised the raised pavement in the Brompton Road between Tattersall's and the Oratory, and the little thoroughfare running at right angles from this road to Pont Street, called Beauchamp Place. Beau-

champ Place had a hundred little shops, and I suppose four hundred subsidiary offices, and half of these shops dealt in curiosities—not of the kind that one used to journey down to dockland for, to Jamrach's and his rivals, not Malay knives and carved ostrich eggs and Japanese chess-men and mummified and dwindled Papuan heads, but articles of cheerful English domesticity, chiefly of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: little prettinesses that might have been on dressing-tables and mantelpieces in houses described by Jane Austen.

There was not a lady in Beauchamp Place—for all the antiques were in the hands of the Fair—to whom I was unknown in those four or five weeks of Jenny's illness. There was, I remember, a fashion for green glass at that time (to-day the desired colour may be blue again, but it was green then); with the result, for they were an imitative sisterhood, that bowls shone benignly verdant in every window. A previous rage for Victorian papier mâché was, I am glad to say, on the wane, and one saw fewer tooth-paste pots made of white earthenware

with painted flowers, and fewer finger-plates from doors and fewer keyhole covers in the same style, than had been common a year or so before. Jenny, in fact, had chosen a very cheerful period to be ill in.

Nice kind ladies they were, not in the least resentful—or at any rate not showing it—if after half an hour's rummaging I failed to find anything that was just right. 'To-morrow perhaps,' they would say: 'we never know what new things may come in at any moment.'

But I always found something somewhere, even if I had to go as far afield for it as Bloomsbury, where Miss Ming, to whom my friend Haven introduced me, still dwelt among her strangely assorted stock, every article 'a darling.' A piece of iridescent glass dug from the soil of Palestine; a Vernis-Martin needle-case; an Elizabethan doubloon which might have been in the purse of Shakespeare or Sir Francis Drake; a Victorian glass paperweight with the gayest of patterns in the very heart of it; all kinds of small boxes, silver, ivory, wood; a pocket nutmeg-grater which, in the eighteenth

century, had been poised thoughtfully over this dish or that but in the twentieth was found perfect as a match-box; blue figures from Egyptian tombs; a crystal-gazing ball; shining animals in carved cornelian; cool little vases of jade: there was always something somewhere, in spite of the common cry: 'We can't keep anything, the Americans snap it up so.'

Every day I took one of these little offerings to the Nursing Home, so that Jenny's room began to look like a Beauchamp Place shop itself, or a small and very select museum. The custom lent a new interest to my visits, the nurses, impudent hussies as they always are, bless them! stopping me to feel the shape of the parcel and guess what it contained and then hovering over Jenny as she opened it; while her doctors, both of whom did a little collecting with the enormous fees—chiefly unearned increment—which poured in upon them, cast curious and appraisive eyes at the mantelpiece on their way to the bed, and, having completed the professional part of the call, examined the latest

novelty at their leisure, expatiating learnedly on its inferiority.

But did Jenny mind? Not a bit. It was hers.

It is unnecessary to say that Jenny was funny with these doctors—dear John, who was her own attendant, and the surgeon. Her own she had not paid for many years—'That's an executor's job,' she used to say—but nothing could affect his devotion to her. As for the surgeon, she treated him exactly as if he were a butcher: indeed, 'the latest Smithfield martyr' was her description of herself.

These two healers used to vie with each other in bringing her the latest story, and I think they were very jealous of each other and probably envied and detested me for my privileged friendship.

Like all doctors, they had either cultivated importance or had had importance thrust upon them, and like all doctors they bore the misfortunes of others with fortitude. The physician in his spare time collected eggs; the surgeon wrote detective stories and had the temerity to introduce one of them to Jenny's notice. As it was written under a

pseudonym, she did not know the authorship. Her opinion of it, as far as she could get, was of the lowest and she expressed it very emphatically.

'I'm sorry,' he faltered, 'I thought it was rather good.'

'Almost the feeblest I ever tried,' said Jenny. 'Whoever wrote it is little more than a half-wit.'

In telling me about it afterwards Jenny laughed with delight.

'You were rather unkind,' I suggested.

'Well,' she said, 'he brought it on himself by being so surruptious.'

'Surreptitious,' I corrected.

'Yes,' she said, 'I daresay you're right. But I never alter words I've got used to.'

But detective stories were not in her line anyway, as I had reason to know, for as she grew stronger she read more and more, at first one new novel a day and then two. They had to be new and it was I who had to make regular visits to the library and ingratiate myself with her pet librarian. This amiable but far from impartial official was in the

habit of grossly favouring her at the expense of those entitled by their subscriptions to far more consideration. His kindly custom was to place 'on one side,' for her, the very latest and most-desired volume; but all his precautions she would render futile (scorning subterfuge) by bearing away the treasure in full view of half a dozen women and two or three servile Kensington husbands who had come expressly for it and had just been assured that there was not a copy in the place. All librarians, I take it, have their favourite subscribers; but I doubt if any other favourite could do as well as Mrs. Candover.

'Preferential treatment' was her watchword; and I had now to toil to make it mine. For myself, I could have done nothing, but with her name as a talisman I brought off some astonishing coups. To have bought the books new would have been far simpler and, to me, more agreeable; but she would not hear of it, her pet librarian was too dear to her. 'We wouldn't lose each other for the world,' she said.

* * * *

Jenny's illness made a change in my life in sending me back to the club, for I now had to arrange my own lunch and dinner and to fill the evening hours. Thus I found myself again among men: not men as one meets them in houses, with their natural foes about them, but men alone; men in no need to do anything for anybody else; men secure from attack; men moving serenely and even importantly about, under the knowledge that the hall-porter lets no woman in. This immunity acts in different ways: it makes some men more grand, more self-satisfied; it makes others strangely candid—even to their own detriment, should hearers be so hostile as to spread the news.

My club, although intellect may be said to be its symbol, was of very varied membership. Statesmen, peers, judges, soldiers, sailors, artists, civil servants, scientific men, authors and journalists—all were there. Each member may also have belonged to another and more specialized club proper to his calling; but they met here too and were very good company, although their tendency to say, on first seeing me, 'How fat you are growing!' may have

been annoying. But that is the worst of a long absence from a club: it always means that you are called fat on returning. Nor is there any real satisfaction in the use of the tu quoque 'You are not exactly a lath yourself,' because the other man can always say—and does—'I said it first.'

I am not sure that I did not like finding myself next one of our judges as much as any, so well stored are their minds, sagacious and ready and apt. I never cease to marvel how it comes about that blackguardly cross-examining advocates can mature into such courteous, benignant and dignified old men.

What did we talk about? Jenny used to ask. Well, what do men talk about? Everything except women.

I remember that at my first arrival at lunch, after a very long absence, I was plunged into the midst of the Periston case, and was asked what I recommended. Periston is a fellow-member, an old acquaintance of mine who had been coming out of the dangerous age rather badly. A man with great gifts but a deficiency of steering apparatus. There are many such.

It was a great nut to carry to Jenny, who likes nothing so much as cracking them. All her practical and imaginative gifts at once have play.

'Don't laugh,' she said, after a night of reflection, 'or at any rate don't laugh too much; but I believe I've hit on an idea.'

'Well?' I said.

'Tell me a little more first. Is he vain? Of course he is,' she added quickly, 'but I mean, does he like attention, servility, homage? Does he pull himself up as he passes mirrors?'

'I think he used to,' I said. 'He's probably given that up.'

'Nonsense!' said Jenny. 'You mean that if you were passing a mirror and knew yourself to look like Mr. Periston you would no longer gloat on your beauty. But that's different. Mr. Periston sees with his own eyes, not yours. Vain people are never wholly distasteful to themselves.'

'"Oh would some power . . ."' I began, and stopped suddenly. Quotations had no interest for Jenny. She borrowed nothing.

'What were you saying?' she asked.

'I wasn't,' I said.

'What is he like in restaurants and clubs?' she asked. 'Is he important?'

'It's a long time since I saw him,' I said. 'But I think he was.'

'Is he gentle with caddies?' she asked.

'Very improbably,' I said. 'But that's not a real test.'

'And he's not poor? It's merely a case of depression, loss of nerve, because he's growing old?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Well then,' said Jenny, 'I think there's only one way. Do you know the King?'

'Only by sight,' I said. 'He has a beard.'

'Does he know you—or, rather, of you?'

'Very unlikely,' I said. 'He's busy, and there are so many others.'

'Do you know any one at Court?' she asked.

'What does all this mean?' I asked.

'Just this,' Jenny replied. 'That it seems to me that the only way to save Mr. Periston is to put him on his mettle, make him proud again and dignified. I'm not going to use a phrase which now comes

into every new novel; but it's clear that he no longer thinks of himself as superior, and he's got to get his conceit back. So I think he must have a title.

'I knew you'd laugh,' she added after a few moments. 'But now consider it and you'll see it's not such a foolish notion. To begin with, while keeping his old name he will have a new one and rather a fine one—Sir Roland. People will call him Sir Roland and enjoy doing so; and he will enjoy it too. There will be much touching of caps. Head waiters will bow lower. Strangers, not being sure whether he's a knight of yesterday or a baronet of very old standing, will—some of them—give him the benefit of the doubt. Widows will make a fuss of him. His stock, as moneymaking people say, will go up in every direction. Now tell me what you think.'

'I think you're far too shrewd,' I said. 'You frighten me.'

'I want to help your poor friend,' she said.

* * * *

Another day at the club, seeing Andrews the novelist sitting with my lawyer Courtfield at one

of the small tables, I asked leave to join them, and, before they could refuse it, sat down.

It was only tactful to ask Andrews what he was at work on at the moment. But his face became so clouded with perplexity and gloom that I was sorry I had spoken.

'Nothing,' he said. 'I can't get on with anything. I'm written out. The bestial, fickle public want a different kind of thing to what I have been giving them, and I can't think up any new plots. I'm in despair.'

'Why don't you write a play?' I said. 'That's where the money is. If you get a success I'm told you're made for life, what with London rights, provincial tours, American rights, and talkies.'

'I don't care for the stage,' he said. 'There's no fun in writing words for people to say—and forget. I want my words to do their own work. I want to use adjectives, and there aren't any on the stage: the actors are the adjectives. And then who can act nowadays? Tell me.'

Both Courtfield and I ventured on a name or two.

'No,' he said. 'They can't act. That's not what I call acting. All they want is parts as like their own characters as possible. By acting I mean—well—acting. There's not a man or woman on the stage to-day that I should care to see in any play of mine.'

'All the same,' I said, 'there's money in it. People must be beguiled and the theatre will always attract.'

'I know it,' he said bitterly. 'But they don't seem to want anything that I write for them. Why, I've got three plays making the round of the managers at this moment.'

'If you want a plot—or at any rate a good amusing central figure,' said Courtfield, 'I can give you one. Which reminds me that novelists and playwrights would be wise to take lawyers into their confidence much more than they do. Because lawyers see so much of the kind of life novels and plays are about. The trouble about books and plays is that they're written by the wrong people. They're written by the people who guess or wish, whereas they ought to be written by the people who know. Not

only lawyers, but doctors and nurses: it is they who know; but they are too busy, or too disillusioned, to trouble about recording facts. Also I suppose there's a trick in it. Personally I've never tried. The chances are that novelists and playwrights are novelists and playwrights because they can't do anything else, and lawyers, doctors, nurses, jog along on their weary way, because they can't do the other thing either.

'Take myself as an example; I am supposed to be a good lawyer with an understanding of human nature, and I can dictate a skilful, or at any rate, a useful, letter; but although I've never tried I know that nothing could make me write a story. Yet the materials locked away in my head must be sufficient for a whole row of them. Take the case I was going to tell you about. There's a client of mine, whom I won't name, the last years of whose life could be minutely reconstructed by the codicils to his will, of which I and my clerk are the only creatures who know anything. A novelist might invent them; but I know. Facts. Written out, in long hand, they'd make wonderful reading.

'I forget how long ago his will was originally made, and he hasn't altered it, but there must be scores of codicils, all added since he had some kind of a nervous breakdown and retired. Before that he was a self-protective, hard, rather stand-offish man. He came out of it affectionate and jovial. No question of softening of the brain; merely a change. All his worries had gone; he knew what his expectations of life were and he desired to enjoy the balance to the full. He was then about sixty, married but separated: practically a bachelor.

'From having been a solitary diner at his club, he took to conviviality and entertaining. And every other morning or so he would pay me a visit, with a new codicil in his pocket-book.

' "I met a charmin' woman last evenin'," he would say. "But far from well-off. I want you to put her down for a little present when I die. Say a couple of hundred quid. Just as a surprise and a little pocket-money."

'Or, "I saw my old friend Harrison's boy, yesterday, for the first time. A nice candid feller who's just got engaged. I saw the girl too—charmin'.

Now wouldn't it be rather a nice idea to put him down for three hundred? He's got to make his own way, you know. It would please him and please his father."

'Or, "There's a feller at my club, a man of my own age, who never accepts a drink because he can't afford to stand them. Just keeps himself decently dressed and pays for a single room somewhere. But as nice a feller as you'd want to meet. Now supposin' him to last longer than I do, a hundred would be a godsend to him. I've got his name here" —and out would come the scrap of paper on which these good intentions were noted.

'Or, "I dined with some people last night that I met on the boat comin' from Bombay. Charmin' people, with a charmin' daughter. They lived at Kingston. Well, the father's been havin' rather a rough time and I lent him a hundred pounds. Don't you think I might add a codicil to my will excusin' him the debt and leavin' say fifty to the girl?"

'The people he fancied didn't even have to reciprocate. He came to me once with a name and address on a slip of paper in a very illiterate hand.

I forget what it was: say Virginia Lacey, 27, Cottesmore Gardens, born April 12, this year. "That's a baby," he said. "The most delicious little thing you ever dreamed of. I saw her in Kensington Gardens yesterday and got the nurse to write down particulars. It would be a bit of fun, I thought, to leave her a hundred for her twenty-first birthday. Blue eyes, tiny pink finger-nails. Pink as apple blossom. Laughed at me, the little devil. She might find a hundred very welcome then."

'That's the way he would go on. He came to look upon himself as a kind of God's almoner. Crossing-sweepers would have been his most natural darlings if this change of heart had come on him a few years earlier. But there aren't any any more: they'd only last a minute nowadays, with all these motors about; so he had to fall back on waiters. I assure you there are a dozen waiters in his will, each to receive twenty-five pounds—or a "pony" as he called it. Some in restaurants and some in clubs. "Put him down for a pony," he'd say. "Poor feller. Waitin' can't be much fun, and sometimes my temper's simply awful. Flat feet too."

'It was like that all the time. If I remonstrated, he would say, "Don't try to stop me. I've been a mean devil all my life and now I'm tryin' to make up for it. Besides, it's goin' to make it easier to die, thinkin' of all these people bein' surprised and happy when they get the lawyer's letter with a cheque in it. They'll think well of me and that may do me a bit of good at the Golden Gate."

'Sometimes, however, he came round on a very different errand. "Isn't there a codicil," he'd say, "leaving a feller named Sharper that I met in Norway a hundred quid? Well, he's a wrong 'un. He's been swindlin' a friend of mine I introduced him to. Cut him right out."

'Or, "I don't think I'll keep that codicil in the favour of a Mrs. Sangler that I met at Brighton. She's become a nuisance and I've had to tell her off."

'And once he asked me if it was possible to make a codicil that a feller would merely read. "Not leavin' him anythin' but just tickin' him off." He had his knife into some fellow-member whose meanness exceeded all bounds and he wanted him

to know that but for that he'd have come in very likely for a "monkey," but as it was he wouldn't leave him a cent. "If he could read it," he said, "it might do him a bit of good." I told him I couldn't be a party to such a codicil as that, but why not make a specific bequest that would have the same effect—such as a copy of Dicken's *Christmas Carol*, hoping he'd read it and take it to heart; and he jumped at that.

'Well, this went on for three or four years and then last week he died. Suddenly. And what do you think? There isn't a bob. He'd been living at a terrible rate and living on his capital. He hadn't dared to tell me. All his investments were sold, one after the other, to keep the pace up, and then when all the money was gone he went too.'

'Then,' I said, 'when he came along with a new bequest he was deceiving himself as well as you?'

'I don't think so,' said the lawyer. 'He was so thorough an optimist that he believed all would come right. You see, he followed horses, and any day there might be a winner at a long price, leading to another and another—accumulators not excluded

—and so he would be on his feet again. The elusive double—what a will o' the wisp and how many pursuers!'

'How did he die?' I asked.

'Don't ask me,' said the lawyer, 'but there was no inquest. He had a good doctor and his heart had been just queer enough. . . . Now if I could write,' he resumed, 'and wanted a central character for a novel, that's the kind of man I should take. Comedy all the way. He was funny with women too: young, middle-aged or old, they were all, the first time he met them, charmin' and adorable. I have been with him when he met them and have been shocked by his lenience. It is seldom, of course, that two men form the same opinion of one woman —fortunately we see every one with our own eyes —but there are cases where a hundred men would agree as to their flashiness or repellent ugliness, vulgarity or transparent falseness. But in these last few years I have never known him fail to admire. They have—the young ones—all been "pretty as peaches"; the middle-aged, "fine women"; and the old, "damned clever" or even "witty." '

'Then how,' I asked, 'did he escape?'

'By his deed of separation,' said the lawyer.

'And why did he separate?' I asked.

'He said his wife made him a liar. He said that marriage made all men liars. They had to catch their wife's eye before they could answer questions; and that wasn't good enough.'

* * * *

I dined out a little too. Old friends who had thought me lost for ever found me again, through club gossips, and fed me and even took me to the play. It was thus that I began to meet young people again: my last being my nephew Vivian and that pretty Hermione Gage whom he married after we butted in and detached him from the claws of Posy Crystal. Claws indeed! Very loving, tending hands they would have been—as long as he would let them.

At the Armstrongs I found Mona Beverley, one of the cool, self-assured, composed and all-informed girls of the day, and with her another frightening product of the age, the young man who possibly was to be her partner for life but meanwhile was

filling the steady post of partner for the evening: bearing her away, as time drew near for ordinary unsophisticated people to be thinking of bed, to this dance and that. They were polite enough to me in their easy, level way, but I never really interested them. Only by suddenly shouting something gross could I, I felt, have got their complete attention; and then, of course, it might not have been gross enough. I was behind the times.

With the older people, however, this belatedness was a virtue, for we never tired of reconstructing the past, asking where So-and-so was now, supplying the answer and canvassing the whole situation.

'Of course she really ought to have married young Brigstock. If she had done that, everything would have gone right. The mystery was, why didn't she? They were engaged; they'd been engaged for months and the wedding was fixed; and then it was broken off. I never knew why. All I know is that we got our wedding-present back and it's made us very careful not to be in a hurry about such things ever since; hasn't it, dear?'

Or, 'The Shipfords, do you ever see them now?'

'Now and then. They're still the same.'

'None of the girls married?'

'No.'

'Still reading each other's love-letters?'

'Yes.'

'Still quarrelling for *The Times* to see if Aunt Nell's dead?'

'Yes.'

'Won't she ever die?'

'Apparently not, but I'm sure they've all spent their expectations over and over again.'

Or we would trace the steps of one of the numerous prodigal sons. 'The last I heard he was in Kenya, where so many people are now finding themselves. But he's a little too old for that, I fancy. They want them young there.'

'Didn't he start in B.C.?'

'Yes, lumber. But he tried everything.'

'Did he ever marry?'

'No one seems to know. Again and again, probably.'

Or—'Why didn't Bertha marry that soldier boy she was so keen on?'

'Bertha Flight?'

'Yes. I heard of her the other day as Mrs. Dukes, but the last I saw of her, in the dark ages, she was going to be Mrs. Custer.'

'I can tell you that. She told me the whole story. You know how casual she is. Well, when Francis went up for his exam he asked her for something to help him through or to give him confidence. What we should call a mascot now, but the word wasn't known then. So she gave him a ring that a sailor had made for her out of a sovereign—they had sovereigns then—on a marlinspike. They used to make a hole in the sovereign and then hammer it and hammer it until it was the right size. She sent this to the soldier boy, who was very sweet on her, and heard no more. Not a word. She didn't write to ask why, because she never wrote anything if she could help it.

'After a while she got engaged to Eustace Dukes and they were married. The day before Bertha's

wedding her sister was clearing up her room at home and packing all her things off to her new house, and among the things she found were a number of parcels all pushed away into a cupboard and not one of them opened. Fancy not opening parcels! But that shows you what a careless creature Bertha was, and probably still is. They were years old, some of them, and among them was one containing books which Bertha had lent to young Custer, and a letter in which he sent back the ring, saying it had brought him luck and asking her to marry him; and if she accepted him would she send him the ring again? There's fate for you!'

'Was she cut up about it?'

'Very. She's never been happy with Eustace. Custer is a Colonel now.'

'Would she have been happy with him?'

'You can't say. Probably they wouldn't have hit it off. Colonels can't bear people who don't open parcels.'

—That was the kind of talk we old people enjoyed.

* * * *

One of the changes in dinner-parties which, after my long absence from them, I noticed, was the increase in women novelists. Young women too. At every house at which I was dining at this time there seemed always to be a budding authoress—either a daughter of my hostess or a fellow-guest. It is perhaps more natural for a girl to write than for her brother, because he probably holds some post and has also his golf and dancing to attend to, whereas by day she has only spare time. He also earns something, whereas she would gladly add to her allowance. The money question will creep in.

My right-hand dinner partner at the Bulstrodes' was a hard-bitten, short-haired woman whose interests lay in the country, among horses and dogs, and we had little in common. Furthermore, she was one of the new swearing sisterhood; 'bloodies' dropped from her lips like rubies. I was therefore not sorry when the time came to talk to the pretty girl on the other side.

'What's your novel about?' I began.

She looked at me with dilated eyes.

'How did you know I was writing one?' she gasped. 'It's a secret. I haven't told a soul.'

'I assumed it,' I said. 'There are so many authoresses now. No inside information at all. Just a bow at a venture. But what is it about?'

'Life, of course. Life as I visualize it.'

'Visualize or envisage?' I asked.

She looked at me searchingly, but I managed to control my expression.

'Either,' she said. 'I think visualize rather a better word. And of course words are tremendously important.'

'But,' I said, 'have you had enough experience of life to make a novel?'

'I've seen a lot,' she said. 'There's father and mother, for example.'

'Naturally,' I said. 'And some uncles and aunts too.'

'I shouldn't do it in such a way that they could be recognized,' she said.

'Of course not,' I said. 'And you can always put a note at the beginning, saying that nobody real has been served up on toast.'

'Ye-e-es,' she said, with another searching look. 'But really there's no need to take anything from anybody—if you have intuition.'

'What age will your heroine be?' I asked.

'About my own,' she said. 'Don't you think that's right?'

'Inevitable,' I said. 'And it will be a novel of to-day and its maladies?'

'Oh yes,' she said. 'I shouldn't care to do anything else. Besides, it is only in the novel that social problems can be presented with any attraction. This is the age of the novel, just as the eighteenth century was the age of the pamphlet.'

'You are too pretty to use the word pamphlet,' I said.

'Please,' she protested.

'You are sure you have a real call to write?' I asked her. 'You don't think there are novels enough?'

'Insincere novels, yes,' she said; 'but not the kind I want to write.'

'It's odd,' I said, 'to find so little wish to be orig-

inal. At your age, free to do what you like until you fall in love——'

'I shouldn't let that interfere with my plans,' she said defiantly.

'It's odd,' I went on, 'to find so little ambition towards originality. It would be so much more amusing, I should guess, to be a pioneer.'

'How?' she said.

'Well, just to take an instance—why don't women more often become architects? The designing of a home is surely their natural work. They know better than any man where the kitchen ought to be, and the pantry, and how to save labour. They would enjoy ordering the builders about and wrangling with their clients over details and expense. It's amazing to me that women have let male architects do the house-planning all these centuries, more especially as houses are constructed far more for women to live in than men. Men go out, often slamming the door; women stay in. To design the houses they are to spend so much time in would be an ideal occupation for them. At any rate they couldn't design them worse than men do.'

'I'm afraid the advice is rather too late,' she said. 'If one is going to be an architect, oughtn't one to decide while still at school? I'm twenty-two.'

'If you really mean to earn your own living,' I said, 'regardless of what may happen on the emotional side, and if you like the idea of house-planning and can afford the preparation, I shouldn't think you're too late at all. But of course the world might lose some remarkable novels.'

'It would be rather fun to design prettier houses than those one sees now,' she admitted. 'If I took your advice and became an architect, would you let me build a house for you?'

'I don't think so,' I said. 'I should never commission a new house. I'm too old; we shouldn't fit. But I might ask your help in doing certain things to an old house to make it more livable in. But you would have to be quick with your education, because I'm nearing the end.'

'Nonsense!' she said, with the young's intolerance of decay, and even disbelief in it.

'I'll make you a present,' I said, 'of a pet scheme

of mine, and that is that the roof of every house should have an enclosed space, three or four yards square and invisible to any eyes but those of chance aviators, who don't count, for sun-bathing. It could either be left open or covered in with the new violet-ray glass that is now made for hospital and sanatorium windows. The additional cost to the original estimate for the house would be trifling, and the benefits enormous. The Germans know all about it, but the German passion for gregariousness and their childish delight in primitive crudity prompts them to do their sun-bathing in camps for the purpose, naked, and, far more than unashamed, intensely proud. The private bathroom I hope will remain an English institution, whether for sunshine or water.'

'Have you got one?' she asked.

'I haven't even a house to add one to,' I said. 'Besides, here again I am too old. After sixty there are not many tonics, external or internal, that are of much account; one is going down the sky and had better realize it and do one's best to be reconciled.'

She shivered.

'I wish you wouldn't talk like that,' she said. 'You're so young, really.'

'I can't deceive myself,' I said, 'and long ago gave up attempting to do so. That was the beginning of wisdom. I don't want to die: no one honestly does, except in disordered moments; but over there Death stands, with his hour-glass and his scythe—horrid symbolism—and no one can dodge him. My own attitude is expressed in the phrase: "Now to join the best people and find out all about it." Meanwhile,' I said, 'which shall it be, novels or houses? Or just the ordinary destiny fulfilled once more—a husband? Probably that would be simplest in the long run. Marry and carry on the world-old tradition of keeping the home.'

'At any rate,' she said, 'you have given me plenty to think about.'

'Make me one promise, if you decide to go on with your novel,' I said.

'Well?' she replied.

'Don't have a character named Peter in it.'

She opened her pretty eyes wider than ever.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because I'm so tired of novels with Peter in them. But I suppose I'm too late in asking that?' I added.

'I can change it,' she said.

* * * *

But although more young women than young men seem to have taken to fiction, they have no monopoly. There was quite a nice-looking boy at the Staniforths who, under ordinary conditions, would be thinking of the open air—vagabondage of some sort, adventure, danger; but when I asked him what he was going to do when he left the University, he said he should write.

'In fact,' he added, 'I've begun already. I'm at work on a novel. A friend of mine reads for a publisher and he's promised to do all he can.'

'And what are you writing?' I asked. 'A historical romance?'

'Good Heavens, no!' he said.

'Something comic?' I ventured.

He was shocked. 'I should hope not,' he said,

'although of course the comedy and irony of life will have their natural place. No, I'm engaged on something very serious. An exposure of some of the worst shams and rottennesses that we subscribe to. An attempt to get honesty and courage into us. Frankness and acceptance of the facts.'

I expressed the conviction that he would call a spade a spade.

'As much as the publishers and a prudish world will allow,' he replied.

'I had lost sight of its prudishness,' I said.

'Oh no, it's better than it was, of course, but it's still far from enlightened.'

'Dots are useful,' I reminded him.

'M'yes,' he admitted. 'But cowardly. How contemptible it all is!'

'What?' I asked.

'All this insincerity and paltriness,' he said. 'Why shouldn't we use the vernacular, the good sinewy Saxon?'

'Is it necessary?' I asked. 'Some very good novelists have managed without it. Book lovers are not

entirely fools, you know. They can read between the lines. Are you ever in doubt as to what happened in any situation in, say, *Vanity Fair?*'

'Oh, *Vanity Fair,*' he exclaimed impatiently.

'Yes, *Vanity Fair,*' I repeated. 'Or *Richard Feverel?* Or *David Copperfield?* Or *Adam Bede?*'

'Those books,' he cried. 'They all want either forgetting or re-writing.'

'I admit,' I said, 'that the word "complex" is absent from all of them, but the complexes are there just the same. What else do you miss?'

'At any rate,' he said, 'a novelist who really wants to write about life should be of his own times and use the language of those times.'

'Including sinewy Saxon,' I inquired, 'which, I suppose, has only just come in again. And what is your title?'

'I haven't decided yet,' he said.

'Shall I give you one?' I asked.

'But you don't know the theme,' he said. 'Except generally.'

'I'll risk that,' I told him. 'I've got an excellent

title for you. Call your book *Why Shouldn't I?*'

His face brightened.

'That's rather brainy of you,' he said. 'As a matter of fact *Why Shouldn't I?* would suit it perfectly. How could you have guessed?'

'Because it's the only question that all young people are now asking,' I said.

He frowned. He didn't like that. I was grouping him, and we hate to be grouped, so exceptional is each of us. Also, although he would resent being called old, he thought of himself as young only in years. Most emphatically he was not young as the other 'Young People' were.

'Have you ever thought,' I asked, 'what you would be doing had you been born before printing was invented? You wouldn't I am sure, have been illuminating missals or transcribing the Scriptures.'

'I never thought of it,' he said. 'What's the use? Here I am, in the twentieth century, and writing seems to have come to stay. But even then I might have been a story-teller. They loved stories.'

'With sinewy Saxon as your natural speech,' I reminded him.

'I suppose so,' he said: 'I hope so.'

'I wonder,' I said. 'If it were so natural wouldn't it have been dull? Anyway you would have had to work harder to interest them, those simple folk, listening with all their ears, than you need to-day. They were probably, in spite of their simplicity, not too easy to please. Story-tellers were not so common that one of them could be disregarded as we now fling aside a book at the library or turn quickly to another column in the newspapers. They had to deliver the goods. In the absence of alternatives, a story-teller, if he failed to satisfy, was disgraced. No free supper for him, no warm corner in the straw near the fire. Very different from to-day, when thousands of columns must be filled every morning, and new books and magazines swarm from the presses like ants but with less purpose. It would be very interesting if writing were abolished by autocratic rule. Salutary too.'

'I don't see how it could be so salutary,' he said, 'if all the authors and journalists with no training

in any other walk of life were suddenly dumped on the dole.'

'I was thinking of readers,' I said.

* * * *

When that pretty Hermione Gage married my nephew Vivian on his rebound from Posy Crystal, the music-hall star, I felt a certain relief, although not unmindful that it might only be momentary. Marriage to-day is so often not a life sentence. But I did not expect so soon to find the girl asking again for counsel: only a year or so later.

The fateful postman, however—that modern bearer of Jove's thunderbolts—punctually brought a letter saying that Hermione desperately wanted to see her dear uncle, and naturally I made an appointment, fixing on a retired restaurant where confidences could be blended with lunch.

It was as I feared: she and Vivian were already contemplating a separation.

'But why?' I asked.

They had, she said, so little in common. Vivian seemed so quickly bored. She failed to hold his attention. He was so often thinking of other things

that she usually had to repeat what she had said.

This is always a bad sign.

By 'other things' could she mean Posy? I wondered.

'Is he composing any new songs?' I asked.

'He begins them,' she said, 'but rarely finishes. He's not a finisher, I am afraid.'

'Is there anyone else?' I asked.

'Not that I know of,' she said. 'But I'm only too conscious I'm a disappointment to him.'

'And you? Is there anyone else in your mind?' I asked.

'No,' she said. 'No. I like Vivian still, but I'm not going to stay with any man who doesn't want me. Why should I? It's degrading.'

'Would you divorce him if he gave you the opportunity?' I asked.

'I should hate to,' she said, 'but I suppose I should. Only that's so degrading too, if he's not in love with anyone else. Nothing strikes me as being so disgusting as arranging anything like that.'

'Our divorce laws don't reflect much credit on our good taste, I must admit,' I said. 'Their basis

is too physical for these days of unbelief and introspection and unrest. But we must use the instruments that are offered. Would you face the publicity?'

'Not unless Vivian was genuinely in love with the other woman,' said Hermione. 'Or I hope not.'

Strange talk, I thought, for a new uncle and a new niece whose acquaintanceship had begun so light-heartedly over a crossword puzzle!

'It's a terrible problem,' I said.

'What do you think we ought to do?' she asked.

'In the dim past,' I said, 'you would have done nothing. You would have grinned and borne it. Vivian would perhaps have been more at his club; you would have devoted yourself to the nursery. But I suppose there are no nursery claims on your time or on your thoughts?'

'No,' she said, 'thank Heaven!'

'What does your father say about it?' I asked.

'Daddy? Oh, Daddy doesn't know.'

'It seems to me,' I said, 'that he ought to know. You ought to go to him instead of coming to me.'

She laughed.

'Daddy wouldn't be able to help. He'd only be furious and hopeless and talk about punching heads. But you know that: you've seen him. You saw him at the wedding.'

'Yes,' I admitted.

'He'll have to know, of course,' she said. 'And he'll want me to come and live at home again; but nothing could induce me to do that. Even a very small dose of not very happy matrimony has made that impossible. No, I shall go on with my painting; that is, if Daddy will continue my allowance. If not, I shall go into an office and live in lodgings. There's always something, if you're in earnest. I saw an advertisement the other day in *The Times* Personal Column for lady waitresses, for the middle of the day only—that might be a solution.'

'Ha! ha!' I thought, 'Doddles has got to work then.'

'No,' Hermione continued, 'I'm all right; and even if I couldn't do any of those things, there's still another plan I've got up my sleeve. But it's

Vivian I'm worrying about, because when we married I felt I had become responsible for him, and of course he's too weak to be alone. If we were merely separated our lives would both be ruined—and yet . . .'

'You want it both ways,' I said: 'you want to be free but you don't want the ugly essential preliminaries.'

'Who could?' she asked.

I was silent, thinking of the reaction of the scandal on Vivian's parents: my highly respectable sister and her theologian husband. But that, of course, was less important: this was a young people's tragedy, and as a matter of fact parents are often less sensitive than rumour would have it. Moreover, parsons' sons are expected to be wild.

'Let's see what Time can do,' I said. 'He's often our best friend.'

'Oh, I will,' she replied. 'But that won't prevent me from getting to work again. I must do something. I don't want to think.'

When we parted I had promised to try to get

hold of Vivian, but to what end I had no very definite idea. Patching up this kind of dissension is very little use; none, in short.

* * * *

I thought much of Hermione on my way to the Nursing Home. A separation would be very unfair to her; the clean cut was the only just thing, for she was made of less susceptible and pliable material than her husband, who would always be in need of women, either as companions or mothers, and would never think twice about the propriety of welcoming them. Hermione was self-reliant and, so far as I could guess, little of an animal either by nature or reading. At any rate, no author would ever reconcile her to promiscuity. Such a girl ought not to be denied another marriage.

I had not meant to tell Jenny about Hermione, who had always been one of her few blind spots, but she took her forceps and extracted the information.

'Where did you lunch to-day?' she asked, after I had arranged the violets and sunk back in the chair by her bed.

'At the club,' I forced myself to say.

'Who was at your table?' Jenny asked.

'Let me see,' I said, feeling very mean and sparring for time. 'Lestrange was there and Williamson and old Vincent, boring as ever.'

'Do you mean Sir Godfrey Vincent, the banker?'

'Yes.'

'It's funny he should have been there, because it says in the paper that he sailed yesterday for New York on the *Berengaria*.'

I said nothing. I could have pointed out how often newspapers are wrong, but I was deep enough already.

'Richard,' said Jenny, 'you're being dark with me. You didn't have lunch at the club. You had lunch somewhere, and with some one you are trying to hide from me—when I'm ill too. A woman. You come in all gay with violets and smiles and tell me lies; and I count on you so. I expect other people to be untruthful—why shouldn't they?—but not you. I'm untruthful myself often, but never to you. Who was it?'

'I am ashamed,' I said. 'I'm terribly sorry. But

you've always been rather difficult about her.'

'Who?'

'Hermione.'

'Oh, you've been seeing that one, have you? I might have guessed it. She's always made you dark; but since she's become your niece I don't see why she should. What's the trouble now? She's tired of your nephew, I suppose, and must see her old cross-word friend at once, and ask his advice. I hope it was good.'

'Everything you say is right,' I said. 'She is unhappy, she did ask me to see her, I did give advice —and I've promised to get hold of Vivian and have a talk with him. Why I was trying to suppress all this I can't now understand; it's because I thought you would be unsympathetic, I suppose. As a matter of fact, so far from wishing to hide Hermione from you, I wish you'd let her come here and then talk to her sensibly. You could deal with the situation better than I. Good Heavens! I don't want the girl. I want to live quietly, on the best of terms with you. She's always been a nuisance; I mean, she's always come between us, with no real reason,

in the silly way that some things seem destined to happen. But if she gets free of Vivian and ceases to be my niece, that will be the end of her as far as I am concerned. Once she resumes her own free single life, I shall see her no more.'

'Possibly,' said Jenny. 'Meanwhile let her come here.'

'One wonders sometimes,' I said, 'if print isn't a very serious influence on marriage. If the newspapers had no divorce cases, and if novels about unhappy couples were prohibited, would there be fewer callous husbands and discontented wives? It is not impossible. Revolt against shackles is in the air, and what is in the air idle people absorb. The trouble is that most young wives are idle. One thing is fairly certain, and that is that if stories about unhappy couples were forbidden, the novelists would starve. Take away this theme and where would they be? The writing of a *Treasure Island* means a lot harder work than the writing of *The Tertium Quid*.'

'I read,' said Jenny, 'on an average two novels in three days, which is I have no notion how many a

year, but far too many, and forty-nine out of every fifty of them are concerned with the problems of marriage. Perhaps then your theory is right. Yet what about animals, who can't read? Are their marriages unhappy?'

'So far as my own observation goes' I said, 'they are as perfect as though really made in Heaven. But one sees so little of farm animals as husbands or wives. Outside the poultry-yard wedlock is a detail. Can we attribute that to the absence of print? A cynic once said that the principal difference between ourselves and the animals is that we write about it and wear clothes.'

'What I want to know is,' said Jenny, 'are there Vivians and Hermiones all over the country and in every class, or are they numerous only in cities among the young and idle and well-to-do and frivolous? They must, I think, be a recent growth, because when I was a young girl all my uncles and their wives, and all my aunts and their husbands, although they might scrap a bit at breakfast, stuck to each other and were fairly amiable. At any rate their names could be mentioned above a whisper.

The best husband I ever heard of was my Uncle Theodore, who used every evening of his life to bring the money in his wife's purse up to two pounds without any questions as to what she had done with the balance, and never kissed any of us, even as babies, without kissing his wife too—so that she could not be jealous.'

* * * *

Vivian, when at last I secured him and established him in an arm-chair in a deserted corner of the smoking-room, was fatalistic and baffling.

'I suppose we're not suited to each other,' he said; 'and that's all there is to it. Lots of people aren't, but only a few have the pluck to face it and break away. Most of them degenerate into a cat-and-dog life. I think we've been lucky in discovering it so soon and being friendly about it. It isn't that I don't love Hermione; I do, only I don't love her enough, and I certainly don't love her all the time. But I wonder if anyone loves anyone all the time. The fact is, I don't suppose I ought ever to marry anybody. I'm probably not the marrying sort. Lots of fellows aren't.'

'It's a pity,' I said, 'that you didn't think of that sooner. For one who is not the marrying sort you have done pretty well.'

'You shouldn't have interfered with Posy,' he said.

'I admit it,' I replied. 'But I didn't know you properly then. I thought you were worth protecting. I suppose you still think of her?' I asked him.

'Of course I do,' he said. 'She may be twice my age, and common, but she's my sort. All you've done by saving me, as you all called it, is to turn me into a blackguard. What have I done that I should be singled out to make women unhappy? It isn't fair.'

He groaned and held his head.

'We still don't touch on the real question,' I said. 'What is to become of your wife? She possibly is the marrying sort. What then? Is she to be prevented from being happy with some more trustworthy companion?'

'It would be a rotten shame if she were,' he said.

'But how can she get her freedom?' I asked.

'Only through an arranged divorce. Do you care for that?'

'I think it's beastly,' said Vivian. 'Beastly.'

'I'm glad you feel like that,' I said.

'Yes,' he replied, 'it makes me shudder. Brighton . . .'

'Meanwhile,' I said, 'don't do anything. Time is often our best friend.'

'I won't,' he said. 'As a matter of fact, I'm going away. I've got a scheme on; but I'd rather not say anything about it now. It will take me out of England for several months and if any good comes of it I shall be able to send Hermione plenty of money, although her old man's not likely to let her feel the pinch.'

'You don't mind her father keeping her?' I asked.

'Not a bit,' he said. 'Why should I? She's still his daughter, even if she did marry. The fact that he thinks me a rotter shouldn't make him any less generous. More so, in fact. I've got no false pride about money; I'm a Socialist.'

'People who haven't any false pride usually haven't any real pride,' I said.

'Very likely,' he replied. 'I can't answer for others.'

* * * *

Whatever I did, whether I dined out or at the club, Jenny had to be given very full reports of the previous evening's entertainment.

'Now,' she would say, 'sit down and tell me exactly what you did. You dined with—?'

I would tell her.

'A proper mixed party?'

'Yes.'

'How boring! Who sat next to you?'

I would tell her.

'What were they like?'

I would tell her.

'Neither of them so nice as me?'

'No.'

'Quite sure?'

'Yes.'

'Did you think of me at all during the evening?'

'Often.'

'Would you rather have been with me?'

'Much.'

'Who else was there?'

I would make an effort to reconstruct the table.

'Was the food good? Tell me exactly what you had. Begin at the beginning. What was the soup?'

'Turtle.'

She made a moue of disgust. 'With those horrible green lumps in it?'

'Surely.'

'Was it good?—I mean did you like it?'

'Very much.'

'You have such coarse tastes, Richard. And yet you are not coarse really. I often wonder about you. What was the fish? Sole, I suppose.'

'Yes, sole.'

'How was it done? Meunière?'

'Yes.'

'Like a restaurant?'

'Exactly, only no one called it "nice."'

'I suppose there was sherry with the soup?'

'Madeira.'

'And you had some?'

'Yes.'

'And champagne afterwards?'

'Yes.'

'O Richard, whenever will you learn? It never suits you to mix. It's clear I must get well very quickly or you'll be in the grave. Was the champagne good?'

'Fair. I always suspect it when the bottle is wrapped up.'

'And yet you drank a lot?'

'I was thirsty and tired.'

'Richard! Richard! And how did you feel this morning?'

'Not too good.'

'I should think not. Never mind, we'll forget it. It's over, done with. What did you have after the fish?'

'Cutlets. Excellent.'

'And then?'

'Partridges; but for Heaven's sake let's talk about something else. It's monstrous that I should have been gourmandizing like that while you were starving here.'

'Certainly not. I like to hear about it. I want to know everything you do, Richard. I'm very fond of you, Richard. Was the silver good?'

'I think so. Very well kept, anyway.'

'Now tell me what you talked about. Did either of those women confide in you?'

'NO.'

'You haven't told me what they were like yet. Who was the one on your left?'

'A Mrs. Talbot. Her husband's in the Treasury.'

'And on the right?'

'Lady Silverhead. Her husband's in the City. A company promoter.'

'How old are they?'

'Fortyish.'

'And you're sure they didn't confide in you? Quite sure?'

'Quite. We talked only about the usual things —new books, new plays.'

'Of which you know nothing?'

'No, I listened.'

'And they both asked you to come to tea one day?'

'Yes.

'Then they did confide?'

'I swear they didn't.'

'Well as long as you thought about me once or twice I don't mind.'

'I did, often.'

'And where are you going to-night?'

'To the Stamfords.'

'Those vulgar people. Well, I hope you'll have a good dinner, but don't be foolish with the drinks.'

'Never again,' I said.

Jenny laughed.

Poor Jenny, lying there, with all her own impulsive nature in check, all her vivid joy of life in abeyance! It made the back of my eyes smart and ache, to think I was so free and active while she was a prisoner and ill; it made me secretly weep too to watch her sparkling interest in my own doings: no envy; nothing but imaginative and zestful participation. This is the true generosity of mind.

* * * *

I enjoyed my evening at the Stamfords, because one of their curious ways is to consult Stone, their

butler, at meals. Stone, now an old man, has been with the family for many years, in addition to his ordinary duties acting as banker or money-lender to all the children as they grew up, accepting no interest and very often not being repaid; but whether this circumstance should entitle him to so much conversation is a question.

He is assumed to know all. 'Just look at the paper, Stone, and see what's on at the Aviary this week,' one of the sons commanded, and Stone brought the paper and read out the names.

'Bare and Forbare are funny,' he said, 'but I don't think much of the rest. There's a better programme at the Forum. They've got Harry Spicer there. If you don't mind vulgarity, he's very good. And a new dancer from America: most nimble, sir, with a charming partner. A blonde.'

'Have you heard anything about the revue at the Trianon, Stone?'

'Do you mean *Knear the Knuckle*, sir? Yes, I've heard it's highly advanced. The Lord Chamberlain's getting very slack, sir; or, I should say, his office is.'

'What about the films?' one of the daughters asked.

'The best this week, Miss, is at the Triumph,' Stone replied at once. 'Silent but with sound-effects. Very beautiful pictures of the South Seas. The principal parts are taken by Dorian Gold and Venice Limpid. They have very little on, but it's all quite nice.'

'Stone, have you heard anything about this new copper mine in Rhodesia?' said my host.

'Do you mean the Wago Reef, sir? Yes, I've heard it spoken well of. Not for a dividend yet awhile, but a safe investment for cold storage. Sure to improve.'

With all his fund of information, Stone does not, however, volunteer. Until he is approached he is silent and stern. There was a painful proof of this sphinx-like discretion, this respect of his position as a servant, when the big race of the day was unfortunately mentioned and the whole family was instantly plunged in woe, having backed nothing but losers.

'By the way, Stone,' said Stamford, 'did you have a bet?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What did you back—the winner?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You did. Why?'

'I heard it was a good thing, sir.'

'Then why didn't you mention it here?'

'I wasn't asked, sir.'

'Good Heavens, man, do you need to be asked?'

'Certainly, sir. Since what I might call the terrible catastrophe of the Derby of 1925 I have never of my own accord opened my lips about a possibility. You will remember, sir, that I then so far forgot myself as to urge you to back an exceedingly disappointing animal.'

'Yes, yes,' said Stamford. 'I remember. Well, what did this wretched creature to-day start at? Thirty-three to one, wasn't it?'

'Yes, sir, but I got a hundred to one. You see, I backed it several weeks ago.'

'All right,' said Stamford ruefully, 'that's the

end of that. But in future if you get a racing tip you'll pass it on. We'll run the risk. Do you understand?'

'Of course, sir, if you insist; but I'd rather not.'

'Never mind about horses, Stone,' said his mistress as she rose from the table. 'Just look at my dress and say if you think there's anything wrong with it.'

'If I may say so,' said Stone, 'it's an inch too long.'

Stone takes so little advantage of the latitude offered to him, and neglects so few of his duties, that he is not only an amusing side-show but a very useful conductor, as the electricians say. If one doesn't want to talk to one's neighbours, there is no need to, because they can listen to Stone. Or, lacking a jumping-off topic, Stone comes in perfectly to fill the gap.

But I personally enjoyed his replies to his very indiscreet old employer, who ought to know better, more than anything that my right-hand partner at any rate had to say. For, lacking as he probably is in everything that appertains to what we call intel-

lect, Stone could supply the details that matter.

Upon new neighbours, for example—a branch of knowledge which all good servants quickly master—he was an impeccable authority.

The Stamfords live in one of the West End squares which still preserve the old amenities and in which no house has been converted into flats; and it is important to know what an invader is like.

'The people at No. 7, sir?' said Stone. 'I understand that there is considerable wealth, acquired in the manufacture of varnishes. The lady, however, comes of an old Cheshire family. One of the young gentlemen is at Eton and the other at Oxford. By the name of Buttress, sir.'

'Might be worse,' said Stamford, whose own lineage is scarcely dazzling. 'And at No. 21?'

'At No. 21, sir? The widow of an admiral with three unmarried daughters and seven black Cockers. They were being exercised in the garden this afternoon by the second footman; the black Cockers, I mean.'

But Stone was called upon for even more intimate assistance than this. Conversation becoming

general, somebody mentioned across the table to Stamford a new mutual acquaintance and asked my old friend how he liked her.

'Bless my soul,' he replied, 'do you know I can't at the moment put a face to her at all, and yet she dined here once, or was it lunch? Stone, you remember Mrs. Lovegrove. Did I like her?'

'You were very pleasant to her, sir.'

'Yes, but was she my sort?'

'Not wholly, I should say, sir.'

'Describe her.'

'Well, sir, she—if I may say so—she interrupted two or three of your best stories. The ones you often tell new guests.'

'I remember now,' said Stamford. 'Of course she did: cut right across them. No,' he replied, 'we don't care very much for your Mrs. Lovegrove. She's very unlikely to come here again.'

* * * *

'One of the things I have been wondering about,' said Jenny, one afternoon, when we had been sitting in silence for an unusually long time, 'is how

few adventures people have. Here are you, walking about London day and night—the biggest city of the world—and nothing ever happens; you see nothing out of the way, and therefore bring me no exciting stories. And yet the papers every morning, and again every evening, are full of accidents, thefts, fires, collisions, murders, all of which have occurred in London. Some one sees them, I suppose, but never anybody that one knows. Why does one have the wrong friends? Why can't my friend see things? Here's a description'—she held up the paper—' of a man springing out of a car in the very middle of Regent Street in broad day, breaking a jeweller's window with a hammer, snatching half a dozen strings of pearls and getting back into the car and clean away. Lots of people saw it; there are interviews with some of them. All strangers. But where were you, Richard? Where were all my other friends?'

'I'm terribly sorry,' I said. 'I do my best, only there's no definite locality for this kind of thing. As a matter of fact I did hear what sounded like a

shot to-day, in St. James's Square, and, like a good reader of detective stories, I at once looked at my watch; but it was only a burst tyre. For the rest of my life I suppose I am destined to look at my watch whenever a tyre bursts. Now, had it been a real shot I might have something to tell you.'

'I'm sure there are some people who are lucky in these matters,' said Jenny. 'People who pick up "scenes" and "incidents" and "sensations," just as others pick up rare first editions in obscure bookshops. I wish I knew some of them. You're very nice, Richard, but your experiences are terribly ordinary.'

'The sight of an accident or an unusual occurrence must necessarily be a matter of chance,' I said. 'You can't arrange for them; not even a camera man at the Grand National can be absolutely certain of a fall. If you want to make sure of adventure you must yourself take part.'

'How?' Jenny asked.

'By yourself being the criminal, the crook.'

'Yes, of course,' she said, her face lighting with

dangerous animation. 'Then, you mean, you would steal and escape, or steal and be caught; but in any case it would be exciting? O, Richard, what a splendid idea!'

'So I am to take to daylight robbery,' I said, 'in order that you may be a little less bored?'

'I'm sure you'd enjoy it,' she said, 'once you began. You'd be so thorough.'

'The police are thorough too,' I said.

'I'm sure you could outwit them,' said Jenny proudly. 'You're so clever. But anyway there would be a chase. All these shop-lifters have cars, which they steal first.'

'So I'm to be a car-bandit too,' I said. 'No, that's not my line. Nor would shop-lifting be. If I took to crooked ways I should invent new kinds of confidence tricks. They are the real fun. Such as the Maharajah picture coup, which I heard of at the club only to-day.'

'And you didn't tell me,' said Jenny.

'I had forgotten it,' I said. 'But it would have cropped up again. Anyway here it is now. Every

word is true. I'll tell it as it was told by the genius himself who invented the whole thing and carried it through and is properly proud of it.

'I was walking along Air Street,' he said, 'on my way to the Café Royal, wondering rather harder than usual how I could make a bit, when I noticed waiting there one of the most sumptuous cars I ever saw: all silver and as long as a Pullman, with no end of a swell shover leaning back in his seat like a lord—or like a lord ought to lean.

'No one has ever accused me of slow thinking, and in a moment I perceived that there might be something for me here. People with cars like that must be worth knowing; at any rate must be inquired into. So I took a note from my case and going up to the window I said to the shover, "Would it be worth a pound to tell me the name of the owner of this marvellous car?"

'He put out his hand and secured the note. "Surely," he said. "It belongs to the Maharajah of Bombolia."

' "Indeed!" I said. "I could see that the owner must be very rich."

'"Rich?" he said. "He's got so much money he lights his cigars with it."

'"And what," I asked, "are His Highness's tastes? His hobbies?"

'"One of the least reprehensible," said the shover, "is pictures. He buys pictures."

'"What sort of pictures?" I asked. "Old Masters?"

'"No," said the shover, who was a superior kind of card, far more intelligent than most, "English pictures. Nice pictures. Things you see at the Royal Academy."

'"Oh!" I said, for that gave me an idea. "And where does the Maharajah hang out?"

'"At the Hyde Park Hotel," said the shover.

'"He doesn't live there?" I said.

'"No," said the shover. "He lives in India and he's going back in a fortnight."

'Oh, is he? I thought. Then I must make haste; and at that I wished him good day.

'Directly I had finished lunch I went to a firm of house-agents and inquired about furnished flats in Mayfair, and in an hour or so took one in Mount

Street for the shortest time possible, a month. A nice flat, with a big hall and a drawing-room and dining-room and three bedrooms, all light and airy.

'Then I went to see a friend of mine who deals in modern pictures.

'"Hullo, Bill!" I said, "what would you charge me for the use of enough pictures to cover five rooms and a hall in my new flat in Mount Street for a week? The best pictures."

'"What do you call the best pictures?" he asked.

'"Well, like that and that," I said, pointing to a couple. One was a bunch of yellow-haired girls lying on marble slabs looking at a sea of Reckitts and the other was a river and a church spire and a rookery and a sunset. "Like those," I said. "Who painted them?"

'He told me that the girls were by a man named Tadema and the sunset by a man named Leader.

'"Were they in the Royal Academy?" I asked.

'"Yes," he said. "One was there in 1885 and one in 1893."

'"And that?" I asked, "and that?"—this time

pointing to a flock of sheep in a snowstorm and a couple of lovers in fancy dress having a tiff. "Were they in the Royal Academy too?"

'"Yes," he said. "Nearly everything in the place, here and in the basement and upstairs, was in the Royal Academy. The sheep, which are by Farquharson, were in the Academy in 1898 and the lovers, by Marcus Stone, were in the Academy in 1884."

'"Well," I said, "that's the kind of thing I want. Are the artists well known?"

'"Of course they are," he said. "They're R.A.'s, all of 'em."

'"Good!" I said. "That's an essential. All R.A.'s —And what would you charge for the use of forty for a week?"

'"I suppose I ought to have five hundred pounds," he said.

'"Yes, and what would they cost if I bought them?"

'"The lot?"

'"Yes."

'"Well, if they were all like those, with good

names and attractive subjects, they'd work out at between six thousand and ten thousand pounds the lot."

'"Fix the sum," I said.

'"Very well," he said, "seven thousand."

'"Right," I said. "Send them along," and I gave him the address, "and tell the men that hang them to stack all the others in the bath-room."

'Bill looked at me very oddly. "Tell me what's the game," he said. "You don't want no R.A.'s."

'"Wait and see," I said.

'"And you don't seem to want no bath," he said. "I hope it's all right. Nothing crooked."

'"Would I do anything crooked?" I asked. "O, Bill!"

'Bill maintained a disgusting silence.

'"Don't ask questions," I said. "All you've got to do is to pick out forty good pictures by well-known R.A.'s and send them along. When it's all over I'll settle."

'The next thing I did was to call on an old friend of mine, Mrs. (or even Miss) Lestrange. Bella: a handsome woman still. I've known her for years.

An actress once and a very good one. A sport too. I told her what I wanted and arranged for her to buy a black dress and weeds.

'The next thing I did was to draw up a letter to the Maharajah of Bombolia which Bella was to write from the flat in Mount Street. In the letter she said that she had heard of his interest in pictures and thought that he might like to know that the sudden death of her husband had left on her hands a very fine collection of modern paintings, which, as she was no longer in the circumstances she had been accustomed to, she wanted to sell at once, en bloc, on very favourable terms to the purchaser. If the Maharajah would name an hour she would be pleased to show him the collection herself. Her one idea was to avoid any traffic with dealers.

'The bait was taken; the Maharajah came to the flat; he liked the pictures; he liked Bella, who seems to have made a marvellous widow; and he gave her a cheque for £25,000 for the lot.'

* * * *

Jenny gasped with joy.

'That's the end of the transaction,' I said.

'Richard,' she exclaimed, 'it's wonderful! Couldn't we do things like that?'

'I can imagine no more amusing life,' I said, 'if one had been brought up rightly.'

'I suppose it's a swindle,' said Jenny, 'but I can't see that it's a very bad one. The widow wasn't the collector's widow, and the collector never existed; but there were the pictures, all genuine, and if the Nabob wanted them at that price they were worth it. It isn't as if they were bogus Rembrandts: Alma Tadema painted them all right. I wish you'd thought of it, Richard. I'm sure you could have done it if you'd set your mind to it.'

'No,' I said. 'The mere simplicity of it has the mark of genius. This kind of thing depends on the originator. You yourself have to be that kind of man to carry it through; you can't imitate him. I have seen scores of expensive cars outside restaurants and never dreamed of asking personal questions of the shover. I'm not that sort. But this unscrupulous opportunist was. Also I don't know any old flames with great powers of impersonation.'

'In fact,' said Jenny, 'you've wasted your life on

respectability and honesty. How I wish you were an unscrupulous opportunist, Richard!'

* * * *

Jenny's plan for the reformation of Periston was approved at the club and I, being the idlest of the conspirators, was chosen to conduct the campaign; but getting a man a title is not as easy as it sounds, or, considering how some titles have been bestowed, is not as easy as you might think. To begin with, there is the difficulty of convincing everybody who is approached that one does not want it, or another like it, for oneself. That incredible fence having been cleared, the real chase sets in.

The Fountain of Honour being too remote, it was necessary for me to find an intermediary. The recognized intermediary is, of course, the Prime Minister of the moment; but he too, though less inaccessible, wisely protects himself. The Prime Minister's Patronage Secretary, although naturally less inaccessible than his Chief, has his own methods of lowering the portcullis.

I had therefore to have recourse to the usual tactics: that is to say, to get hold of a man who knew

a man of influence here who knew a man of influence there who was very intimate with a Party Whip who was the closest friend of the Patronage Secretary—and hope for the best. The initial duty was, of course, to convince the first man that the case was sound; and since there are thousands of men technically deserving of a handle to their names, and Periston had never even taken the chair at a public meeting, this was not simple.

'No,' I had to say again and again, 'it is perfectly true: he has no claims whatever. He has done nothing. We are asking for it for no other reason than to save a good man in adversity.'

'Yes, but the Honours List isn't a new version of Thomas à Kempis,' said my friend.

'Why shouldn't it be—for once?' I asked. 'Nothing discreditable there.'

'But we must be practical,' he replied. 'With all these applicants, hat in hand, who have done the things that are necessary—served their apprenticeship, in short—how could room be found for a fellow who has never even given it a thought, who might even refuse it when the offer is made?'

'He wouldn't,' I said. 'But the unexpectedness of it is the whole point. Don't you see what it might mean to a man spiritually down at heels to find that his King has had his eye on him and has picked him out for encouragement or reward? It would be wonderful; far beyond anybody's salts.'

'But you can't use the machinery of political recognition like that,' he replied. 'There'd be the devil to pay. In fact, nowadays it's an essential that the reason for the ennoblement is given. Think how it would look if the papers announced that Sir Tiddleywinks—'

'Roland,' I said.

'—that Sir Roland Periston's K.B.E. had been awarded for losing his nerve at the age of fifty-five?'

'No,' I said, '"for recovering his nerve at the age of fifty-five."'

'Very ingenious,' he conceded, 'but sheer casuistry. Of course it's impossible. I couldn't go on with it. No, bring me an honest case: any one who's done anything—for instance, given a bit of waste land for a public park, even though it sent up the value

of his surrounding property—and no doubt the wheels could be set in motion; but not for your friend. The Honours List hasn't time to take the future into account; it is concerned with the past.'

* * * *

When I told Jenny that there was no chance for the success of her scheme of regeneration-through-snobbishness she astounded me once again by one of her periodical attacks of feminine illogic.

'Poor Mr. Periston,' she said. 'But couldn't you contrive to get a title for yourself? I would love you to be Sir Richard. It's so vibrating and deep: Sir Richard! It doesn't matter whether you're a bart or a knight: it would be Sir Richard just the same. "Yes, Sir Richard." "No, Sir Richard." "This way, Sir Richard." It would be fascinating to hear them say things like that.'

'It wouldn't fascinate me,' I said: 'I should die of shame.'

'Oh you,' said Jenny, 'you don't matter. It's I who would be excited. It would make me a Lady too.'

'When?' I asked.

'When Jack dies,' she said. 'He can't live for ever.'

'Let me tell you here and now,' I said, 'two things. One is that nothing would induce me to take a title, and the other is that I intend to continue as I am, single and free—or as free as my devotion to you allows. For devoted I am. Why, I can't explain, for with this low taste for ostentation, to say nothing of the way in which you refer to your husband's expectation of death, you are unworthy of any right-minded man's love.'

'O, Richard!' she cried, 'Sir Richard! You'll change your mind.'

* * * *

Jenny's birthday, which occurred while she was in the Nursing Home, called for efforts more special than my morning saunters of discovery in Beauchamp Place. In fact, it took me as far afield as Bath, where, I was informed, I should find a semi-amateur dealer in jewellery who often had very exceptional and beautiful things. With a mind in-

tent on long ear-rings I took a day off, first warning Jenny not to be inquisitive; and in the famous city of the West I found what I wanted.

At the table in the dining-car on the return journey I had, as sole neighbour, a tall man of about sixty—the nondescript advanced middle-age—who, after saying 'Good evening,' resumed his evening paper until the meal began.

Having finished his soup he drew my attention to a divorce case which just then was occupying such attention as the Court could spare from its Probate and Admiralty duties, and remarked, as thousands of other men were probably remarking at the same moment, all over England, 'The puzzle is, why these people ever marry.'

We were lightly cynical about the altar and its vows as we ate our soles (lemon); but with the roast mutton came a humane note.

'Of course,' I said, 'I ought not to talk about marriage at all, for I have kept single; but one always does.'

'You have the observer's right,' he remarked.

'The evidence is too superficial,' I replied. 'Only

those who have been through it can really know.'

'My marriage fell down,' he said, 'simply because my wife and I were unfitted for each other. Both being of independent means, we were able to part amicably.'

'An exceptional case,' I commented.

'Yes, we were very lucky. Neither of us has wanted to marry again. At least I haven't. I can't speak for my wife, but I suppose that if she had wanted to, I should have heard of it. She would always do what she wanted. There was no other attachment in my time, of that I am sure.'

'Sure, in such matters, is a strong word,' I ventured.

'Well, practically sure,' he amended.

'Then, if I am not presuming, what was wrong?' I asked. I don't usually ask such questions, but he seemed disposed to candour.

'Just ourselves,' he replied. 'We could not agree. To what extent I irritated her, I can't say, because she didn't bother to tell me. I was as negligible as that. But I know how she got on my nerves. For one thing, she had no idea of economy at all. She

had been brought up luxuriously, under a much too indulgent father. I, on the other hand, had been brought up in the principles of self-denial. To us, in my family, hot-house fruit, horses, electric-launches—special things like that—which formed part of her daily routine, were red-letter events. It is possible that we could have afforded them, but we didn't.

'I had every opportunity,' he continued, 'during the engagement, to learn all this; but I didn't learn anything. During engagements one doesn't learn. Or one is confident that one's influence will be powerful enough to correct such errors later on.'

'It can be even worse than that,' I said. 'It has been so arranged, I fancy, that during engagements blemishes can look like beauties, and foibles and even faults have an attraction of their own. Very clever of the Powers! For the moment.'

'Only too true,' he said. 'I'll give you an example. My fiancée had what I thought an unnecessary but very amusing habit of sitting on the hearth-rug with her back to the fire, so near it that she used to scorch her clothes. In those days I used to laugh;

but when she continued to do this after we were married I was furious. I could smell the singeing as I entered the house. Nothing would make her see that she was being absurdly wasteful. Nothing would make her respect my wishes in the matter. She valued her idiosyncrasies more than jewels or anything I could give her; while for ordinary prudence and sensible thrift she had something far more deadly than dislike, and that was disdain. She didn't buy things she didn't want—she had none of the ordinary woman's weakness in a shop, and as for going to the Sales, she would rather die—but she bought the few things that she did want at the most foolishly expensive places and met my remonstrances with a cold contempt that turned my heart to lead. If they won't listen to us and agree that we know what we are talking about, how can they love us?'

'Or how,' I interposed, 'can we love them?'

'Exactly,' he said. 'I did love her for a while, I am convinced; but she wouldn't do anything to encourage me. One of her most annoying tricks was to say, after I had made a pun or a joke, "I sup-

pose you're being funny." Well, I was. All for the good cause, as I thought. But I had much better have held my tongue. Yet, in married life, what's the good of holding your tongue? You ought to want to tell each other everything and not be guarded. Isn't that so?'

'Undoubtedly,' I said. 'But during your engagement didn't you get any inkling as to her attitude to facetiousness?'

'I suppose I ought to have done,' he admitted. 'But she was always so jolly that I didn't think of it. Besides, in those days I liked to listen to her. Mind you, she was always amusing. No one lacking what is generally called a sense of humour was ever so amusing as she could be; but when one begins to be censorious and resentful one takes hold of everything by the wrong handle, and what had once kept me laughing now filled me with anger. I dare say I should be different with her now, when we are both older, but if I know one thing about myself it is that I shall never try.

'Mind,' he resumed, 'I mustn't be unfair. Credit where credit is due. It was only manufactured

humour, whether of literature or conversation, that she didn't appreciate, often to the point of interrupting our wittiest guests in the middle of their best things; which made me mad again. Her sense of the comic in actual life was marvellous and she had the power to reproduce it. No one recounted a humorous experience of her own so gaily.'

'I suppose it is such women,' I said, 'who drive their husbands to the club, where audiences are far more lenient and a very little artificial humour can go a very long way. And all this time,' I asked, 'what was happening to our old ursine friends, Bear and Forbear? I thought they had been created purely in order to meet such contingencies.'

'I suppose so,' he said, 'but we weren't that sort. We were the impatient, intolerant kind. To go on with this absurd indictment,' he continued, 'if it doesn't bore you—she infuriated me further by her way of instantaneously sizing people up and acting accordingly. If they did not reach her standard of breeding or genuineness—the only two things she cared about—she would have nothing to do with them, would barely be polite. And most of my

friends, who automatically should have become hers, failed to satisfy her. One of her most maddening phrases about them was "Not out of the top drawer." My friends too! But it was a criticism, a verdict, a judgment, from which there was no appeal. That was the end. The unfortunate creatures might be received, but they would be conscious of frigidity and come no more. I used to call her a snob for this, but I can see now that her unflinching, impregnable honesty was at the back of it. She could not pretend, whereas I was all for compromise and getting on well with people. So you see how we were situated: we didn't belong to the same country, we didn't belong to the same race, we didn't speak the same language. And in the absence of passion, which never existed in her, and was a doubtful quantity with me, what was there left?

'This frankness—this ruthless candour to others, to their face—was unbearable. I don't want people to be dishonest, to lie; but there are certain rules of life framed to hold society together, and chief of those is that the whole truth and nothing but the truth should be told as seldom as possible. My wife,

however, having no interest in the well-being or continuance of the human family, made no concessions whatever: not out of any conscious defiance, but because it wouldn't occur to her to do so. Again and again I have winced and flushed to hear her say to nice people who asked her to call on them, and obviously wanted her to do so and were not merely being conventional, "Oh no, nothing would induce me to. I never call on anybody." What do you think of that?'

'I think she had great courage,' I said.

'But it wasn't courage,' he replied. 'It was her nature. Lots of people don't intend to call, but they conceal that purpose. They mumble something to the effect that they will be delighted; and then they do no more. But my wife wasn't like that. Knowing she would never go, she said so in so many words. She couldn't be bothered with a false position. We all have our own forms of self-indulgence and hers was frankness.'

'I find myself admiring her very much,' I said.

'Here's another example,' he resumed. 'I re-

member being taken with her, by a country hostess, to have tea with a local lion, a well-known novelist. He was obviously much impressed by her; she kept him laughing all through the visit; and when we were leaving he handed her a copy of one of his works which he had just inscribed to her in very complimentary terms.

'But she wouldn't accept it. "No, thank you," she said, with the quick gesture of rejection or dismissal which was one of her most characteristic and, to me, irritating movements; "I should hate to have it, I can't bear your books."

'The poor man didn't know where to look, and both I and our hostess were miserable. But my wife never gave the incident a second thought.

'And yet she wasn't rude. She had charming manners. It was simply a refusal to compromise. Very admirable really, but terribly disconcerting, and, to a coward like myself, a constant source of grief and shame. How would you have felt about it?'

'I—oh, I'm a coward too,' I said. 'Most men are cowards. But probably it didn't hurt others so much

as you. From your description of the lady I should guess that along with her devastating directness went something very attractive and disarming: a quick smile; an obvious disinclination to wound.'

'Yes,' he said. 'That's true. It was I whom she wounded most. But to admit that didn't help matters; the fact remained that I had to live with the wounder and the situation became more and more impossible.'

'The divorce laws are so busy worrying about infidelity,' I said, 'that they take no account of the real snags in the stream of matrimony. Infidelity, before it is discovered, can, I am told, run concurrently with the most assiduous attention and solicitude, but these other impediments to sympathy and good fellowship don't have to be discovered: they obtrude themselves all the time and are ceaselessly exacerbating. Two friends of mine whose courtship was a dream of contentment parted within a year or two entirely because the wife liked the windows open and the husband wanted them shut. Too many women have a deplorable weakness for fresh

air; but this one's desire for it amounted, her husband assured me, to a mania. To apply to the Court for a decree on such grounds would be, of course, ridiculous; but it was sufficient to break up the home.

'They have now returned, like yourself, to single life, he to his air-tight London flat and she to a house at Crowborough where such visitors as have the hardihood to stay with her sit in the drawing-room in their overcoats. Both are happy again. Incompatibility of temperature was their only trouble, but it was enough. Without all that fresh air she would have been ill; with it, he suffered from continual colds. Why shackle them any longer?'

'Now I come to think of it,' he said, 'my wife was a fresh-air addict too. But I am not bringing that against her. I had my own rooms to retire to. It must be awful when one is poor and pressed for space.

'Anyway our experiment was over. To me, she was a continual cause of outraged feelings and desecrated tradition. To her, I was an intolerable

fault-finder and pedant. So we went to the lawyer and drew up the deed she insisted on, with a clause about never molesting one another, and I haven't seen her since. That was more than thirty years ago. Yet I admire her increasingly. Having seen many other women and perhaps learned something of life and become more sensible, I realize what an exceptional creature she was and what a mess I made of it all by want of understanding and lack of any kind of her own careless bigness. But nothing could have made us a happy couple. Nothing could do it now, should we try again. We are of different countries and races and, as I have said, speak a different language.

'Well,' he added, 'here's Westbourne Park, so we shall be at Paddington directly. I hope I haven't bored you, but so far as I can remember, you asked for it. It is not my habit, I assure you, to tell every fellow-passenger the story of my life.'

'You have done me a great honour,' I said, 'by giving me so much of your confidence. And I am glad to have met one half of so sensible a couple.

If I thought I should ever meet the other half it would give me a new purpose in life. She sounds like the kind of woman in whose company I should revel.'

'She would be getting on for sixty by now,' he said.

'That is what I should value,' I said. 'A contemporary.'

'Well,' he said, 'I can't give you her address, for I don't know it. And she may be dead, although I think I should have heard if she was. But I imagine she still calls herself by her married name—Candover.'

* * * *

'Who do you think I met in the train yesterday?' I asked Jenny as I sat by her bed the next morning. 'I'll give you a hundred tries.'

'Please tell me,' she said. 'I'm tired. I had a bad night.'

I told her.

'I'm glad I didn't have to guess,' she said. 'I should never have thought of Jack and you meeting. Where was it?'

I told her everything except the main subject of our conversation.

'Did he look handsome?' she asked.

'Distinguished,' I said.

'Good clothes?'

'Very.'

'He always had good clothes and wore them well,' she said. 'I think that was chiefly why I married him; that and his good looks. But it's not enough, really. There must be some brains too; conversation. And, above all, understanding of differences. Jack was always trying to make me resemble himself. You're not like that. No one could call you handsome, but you're not repulsively plain and you're always entertaining and admiring. You do really admire me Richard, don't you? You're not acting? No, I know you're not; you couldn't act. And one forgets your looks almost at once. Jack's other fault was that he had nothing to do and was therefore too much in the house. Men should leave directly they've finished their horrible coarse breakfast. But it was his constant criticism of me, and wishing me to change my habits, that settled it.

Nothing would make me change; no man on earth could make me change. Except perhaps you, and you wouldn't want to. Would you?'

'Certainly not,' I said. 'Also I'm too old to expect it.'

'I'm so glad you're old,' said Jenny. 'Jack wasn't old and he expected it all the time. How did he look? Well? As though he would live a long while yet?'

'He didn't seem robust,' I said. 'Rather fragile in fact. But those often hold out the longest.'

'It's a pity you couldn't have told him about me,' said Jenny. 'He would have been interested. But I wouldn't have him in this room for a million pounds. He maddens me.'

* * * *

'I had a bad night,' said Jenny, 'but I didn't mind, because I lay awake thinking about my father and what a darling he was. I doubt if any little girl ever had a nicer one.

'I don't think I ever told you about *The Saturday Surprise*, which no one but he could have thought of and no other little girl could ever have known

about. You see, he was always being asked for help, and always giving it, and among his many debtors was the owner of the local paper in our post town. The *Oldbury News* it was called, and it came out every Saturday. Well, the printer and bookseller who owned this paper got into difficulties and appealed to my father to come to his rescue, and my father did so by taking the paper over. It went on coming out as usual, but it now belonged to him and it was because of that that he could arrange *The Saturday Surprise*. I was then about seven or eight and very fond of reading. So every Friday my father used to send the editor a little paragraph or notice which was meant for me and me only, and after the regular edition of the paper was printed off, one of the old compositors, named Joe, who was in the secret, used to set this up and slip it into one copy only and I used to find it on the breakfast table the next morning. That was *The Saturday Surprise*.'

'Have you kept them?' I asked.

'No,' she said, sadly. 'I was too young to realize how novel they were, and my father was the last

man to keep anything. But I can remember lots of the paragraphs, almost word for word. Usually they were jokes, but now and then when I had been naughty he used the paper to reprimand me. It was a very clever idea, because as I didn't know that he had been told, I was expecting something very different. In fact it was well-named *The Saturday Surprise*, for I could never anticipate it with any certainty. There was first the fun of looking for my own particular bit, all up and down the columns, and then the fun of reading it. I'm sure no other little girl in the world was so spoiled.'

'Give me some examples,' I said. 'It sounds delicious.'

'The ones I remember best,' she said, 'are those that were intended to correct my manners. If I'd been in a bad mood I would find, among the advertisements, something like this:

> Lost, on Friday last, about 10.30 A. M., at Greendene Manor, during the geography lesson, a temper, the property of Miss Jenny Gay. Any one returning the same in perfect condition will be rewarded by her proud parents and grateful governess.

I might still have been sulking, but I couldn't go on after reading that.

'Another one that I remember, after I had been misbehaving, stated that the local auctioneer had received instructions from Mr. Charles Fortescue Gay to sell Greendene Manor because his daughter Jenny was, by her tantrums, making the house impossible to live in. The sale would take place on the 30th of February and the first lot to be put up would be Miss Gay herself, without reserve.

'The next week my precious father took it all back by inserting a notice under the heading "Personal," saying that owing to the sweetness and lovableness of Miss Jenny Gay during the past few days, he had decided to withdraw Greendene Manor from the market and to remain in residence there as before.

'My father must have worked very hard to keep up the supply; and old Joe must have enjoyed his share in it too, especially when it was most carefully hidden. I remember once taking two or three hours before I could find my name, and then it

was among the testimonials to a new kind of hair dye.

This is the best hair dye that I never intend to use.
(Signed) JENNY GAY.

'My birthdays were reported in full, with lists of presents; and once when I fell off a pony there were large-type headings.

ACCIDENT AT GREENDENE
MISS GAY THROWN

and half a column about my bravery and presence of mind, although I wasn't a bit hurt and remounted at once.

'When I had a new doll I found its arrival recorded among the Births.

'Every one was in the conspiracy, so that I was really driven to be careful. For example, one day when I was in the greenhouse I ate a peach. I could always get one by asking old Eagles, the gardener, but this time he wasn't there and I just took it and forgot it. But I had been seen and the deed was reported, so that on Saturday I found a paragraph headed:

DARING THEFT OF FRUIT

and running like this:

On Wednesday last Mr. James Eagles, head gardener at Greendene Manor, missed a valuable peach which only a short time before he had seen growing in one of the glass-houses, and was saving for his employer's lunch. Although no arrest has yet been made, the police have their eye on a female loiterer dressed in blue, with a straw hat and white socks, who had been noticed in the neighbourhood behaving in a suspicious manner.

'But when I had been very good, and knew it, and knew that there could have been no talebearers on the other side, it was almost unbearably exciting to wait for Saturday and see what the paper was going to say. I remember one delirious week when there was an account of a Little Girl Show as though it were a Flower Show, and the first prize for everything was won by Miss Jenny Gay, while in the Conduct Exhibits she was Highly Commended.'

'What luck you had,' I said, 'to have a father like that! And how sad that he had to die. There are certain types that ought to be immortal. A foolishly-managed world.'

'To die?' said Jenny. 'Ah yes, that reminds me.

The worst Saturday of all I shall never forget. I had answered my mother back, a very tempting thing to do, and ever since then my father had been sad and aloof and avoided me. I knew something terrible would follow, but when Saturday came I couldn't find it. Had I been so bad, I wondered, that the lovely game was over? But after going through the paper again and again and finding nothing, I chanced on the only section left, which I had naturally passed over—the Deaths—and there I read, through blinding tears, how my father had died because of me. It was terrible!

Gay. On the 6th inst. at Greendene Manor, Oldbury, Charles Fortescue Gay, after a painful illness brought on by his beloved little girl's disobedience and rudeness to her mamma.

Who could be disobedient or rude again after that?'

'You, I expect,' I said.

'True,' she replied. 'So much so that my father, although he never again wrote anything so frightening as that first obituary notice, put in a paragraph not long after entitled "Renewed death of Mr.

C. F. Gay," attributing his end to the continued contrariness of his only child.'

'When did he really die?' I asked.

'After I was grown up,' she said, 'but so far as I was concerned, he died when I married. Fathers do, you know. But it was never the same after my frocks grew longer and I put my hair up. Until then I had been his and always at home, but after that I used to go away on visits, which he hated, and young men used to come to the house, and those he hated even more. Every young man was either a "puppy" or a "cub": an "insolent puppy" as a rule, and a "conceited cub," but sometimes a "conceited puppy" and an "insolent cub." All except one that I really liked, a gentle creature, very shy, who was "that poor half-wit." '

'And your husband?' I asked. 'What was he called?'

'He couldn't bear Jack,' she said. 'He called him "Old Prunes and Prisms." Poor darling father! He was right too.'

* * * *

The changes being rung on a very small number of guests in most of the houses that I frequented at that time, it was not surprising that at the Simpsons' I found again the pretty girl whom I had attempted to deflect from novel-writing into architecture.

'And how is the book going?' I asked her, when at last we foregathered.

'It's not going,' she said. 'I've stopped it.'

'So you've become engaged,' I replied.

She gave me another of her startled looks.

'No,' she said.

'But you're thinking about it?'

'Why should you say that?' she asked. 'Why do you always appear to know so much about me?'

'Just my good fortune,' I said. 'Lucky guesses —that's all. But it's obvious that something has happened to you to cause you to break off your novel, and that something is probably the substitute of real life for invented life. In another word, love.'

Her very attractive eyes dilated again.

'But why,' she asked, 'shouldn't I have taken your advice and turned to architecture?'

'If you had,' I said, 'you would have hastened to tell me. And you made no effort to speak to me before dinner, when there was time.'

'You terrify me,' she said. 'Are you a detective?'

'No such luck,' I said.

'Then you're a K.C.'

'God forbid!' I replied fervently. 'I'm merely a mathematician. I put two and two together and sometimes they make four. Now that you tell me you have given up your novel and say nothing about becoming an architect, I realize that you are doing something more important to you than either—you are living. Don't be ashamed of it. There's nothing better.'

'Oh, I'm not ashamed!' she cried.

'Is he rich?' I asked.

'No. He's only got his salary.'

'Well,' I said, 'don't wait too long to be married, or he'll be too well off. Marry him while he's poor.'

'But how extraordinary you are!' she said. 'That's

the very reason we should wait—or so every one says.'

'My advice is just the reverse,' I said. 'Marry while you're poor and have some fun making both ends meet, and particularly in your little treats and excursions. That's when marriage is worth while—when you're scheming to make an extravagance possible and denying yourselves to give the other one presents. And, above all, make your preparations together. The last time I was in France I went into the country early on a Sunday morning and just outside Paris there was one of those new settlements of tiny huts, chiefly wood, each with a few square yards of garden. And a young man and a young woman were at work finishing off one of them—their own. He was painting the door and she was painting the shutter. And the sight of them made me cry. Why did it? I suppose because they were so young and so keen and so excited and were being so busy getting ready for life. And how much more amusing to finish off your home yourselves than to telephone to a firm to do it for you! Don't you agree?'

'I think so,' she said. 'Yes.'

'It's not as if you demanded luxury,' I said. 'You look to me like a sensibly-brought-up girl. You don't rouge your lips. In other words, at any moment of the day he'll be able to kiss you without spoiling either your mouth or his own. It's a bad thing for a girl, and for life, when impulsive kissing is ruled out: lipsticks can sign away more honest healthy liberty than any tyrant's sword or pen ever did.'

* * * *

As soon as the worst was over and Jenny began to climb the hill again we had a new occupation; for, a voyage having been prescribed, we had to decide where to go. That is to say, I had to, for Jenny's idea of geography had always been so vague that she was of little help.

'Isn't there a place called Venizelos?' she asked, after at last realizing that her own little house on the Riviera was out of the question. 'I've always liked the sound of that.'

'I suppose you mean Venezuela,' I said. 'I doubt if that's very suitable for an invalid.'

'Isn't it hot?' she asked.

'Yes, it's hot, but it's not too reposeful. There are Revolutions.'

'I should like a Revolution,' Jenny said.

'Later perhaps,' I suggested. 'Just now you are to be on a ship for a long time, to leave it at some warm place where there are comforts and even luxuries and no perils, and then to come back strong and well.'

'I don't want to be too strong,' said Jenny.

'Strong enough, then,' I said. 'Now, where do you want to go?'

'Aren't there some islands with turtles?' Jenny asked.

'You mean the Galapagos,' I said. 'But there's no hotel.'

'I hope it will be an island,' said Jenny. 'I should like there to be palm trees and lagoons. Lagoon is such a lovely word. Richard, you ought to get an atlas for me to look at. And ask all your men friends, who know so much; and go to those offices all about Pall Mall with model ships in the windows: perfect ships, so beautifully made, which never roll or pitch.

I've always thought it would be a delightful life to make models of ships and railway engines. It's odd how one never meets any one who does it. One spends all one's time meeting the wrong people.'

The result was that gradually her room filled with pamphlets in praise of the distant and most expensive parts of the globe, and we spent the afternoons in discussing them. The world becomes very small under such talk, consisting principally of the West Indies, the Amazon, Rio and Buenos Ayres, the Cape (with Victoria Falls) and Ceylon. Superb and sumptuous vessels of 15,000 tons had been built for no other purpose than to convey us to any of these regions and back again at the lowest inclusive rates; but how to decide on which? We studied their plans, rejected and selected cabins, but could not make up our minds. Even Jenny, for once, was woolly; but then she had been ill.

I had one question for every booking clerk: 'Are there mosquitoes?' but as every booking clerk had the same answer: 'No, not to speak of'—a reply sinister in its ambiguity—I was not much assisted.

The men at the club whom I consulted about

destinations abroad were of two schools, which I may describe as that of the genuine travellers and that of the winter-voyagers with an acute sense of nourishment. Some of the real travellers were really helpful, or would have been if their counsels had not conflicted.

We ranged Mercator's Projection like boy scouts on a common.

'What about South Africa?' I asked.

'Not for an invalid,' said some one. 'The only thing to do there is to go up to the Victoria Falls, and that would be too tiring.'

'What's the matter with Rio?' said another. 'A nice, long voyage across the Equator, a beautiful city, good hotels, good drives. Don't stay in Rio; stay outside, at the Copacabana, with the surf breaking on the sand all day and all night, and no mosquitoes.'

'That sounds better,' I said; 'I'll make some inquiries.'

'I don't see why you want to patronize foreigners,' said another man. 'Why not keep it in the family? What's the matter with Bombay or Calcutta or

Madras? Or, better still, Lucknow? Perfect in winter. The only thing you miss there is the sea.'

'I was forgetting,' I said. 'India's no good, and neither is Brazil, because it must be an island. My instructions are precise: an island.'

'What about Samoa?' some one asked.

'Too long a voyage,' I replied. 'I want three weeks out and three weeks back and as long there as seems good.'

'Then your course is perfectly easy,' said the second man. 'Ceylon. Ceylon fills every requirement. All you have to do is to fix the passage and then cable for the right rooms at Colombo. The Galle Face Hotel.'

'Why not Cuba?' some one inquired.

'Because Cuba costs a fortune,' was the reply. 'The rich Americans have sent up the standard to impossible heights for us. And the Bahamas are very nearly the same.'

'Are there any palm trees in Ceylon?' I asked.

'Palm trees? My dear fellow the palm is the principal tree of the island.'

'And lagoons?'

'There are great natural inland lakes anyway, and tanks, as the artificial ones are called, made by the Kings long before our ancestors over here had begun to paint their bodies blue. Yes, I think you might say Ceylon has lagoons, if that's an essential.'

'I should be happier if it had,' I said.

'Are you equally keen on an English chaplain?' he asked.

'No,' I said.

I record these conversations as though they were fluent, but as a matter of fact they didn't run like that, because so many of us were deaf. The older I grow, the more deaf people I meet. I suppose it is the effect of the increase of machinery and its din. Horses made a clatter, but the drivers did not hoot: at most they cracked their whips or shouted Hi! But now . . . How the aurists must bless the Klaxon!

I found that old Lester, one of the sweetest-natured men I ever met, with that added gentleness of expression with deafness can lend to some faces, had become particularly hard of hearing. One of the saddest things in life, he said, is that the re-

mark which one fails to catch the first time and has to have repeated, is so seldom worth it.

The decay of the faculties is a very unhappy spectacle. I have an aged aunt whom I think it my duty now and then to take for a drive. She lives in a house where three or four mental cases are received and tended, and is mostly in a condition of trance, waking with perfect punctuality for meals, which she eats with extraordinary zest. Perhaps it is not a little because I have been her favourite nephew for more than half a century that I pay her these little attentions; but I might as well leave her to her solitude, for on every occasion, after I have steered her up the steps into the hands of her attendant and said good-bye, she asks, 'Who was that plain but pleasant gentleman who has just gone?'

* * * *

So much for the genuine travellers. The winter-escapers, with highly-trained stomachs, had very definite ideas too, but they also conflicted. They all recommended different routes or different shipping lines. It was astonishing how much they knew about steamer catering.

'Whatever you do,' said one man, 'don't go by the Pink Funnel. The food's horrible.'

'The Vermilion Star isn't much better,' said another.

'I should take one of the Gorge Company's cruising boats,' said a third. 'It doesn't much matter where it takes you—six weeks in warm latitudes—the eating's so good.'

To these knowing men, in their arm-chairs, each secreting a weekly illustrated paper from the others, the wonderful ocean was not a highway to foreign lands and strange harbours and unfamiliar coast lines and mysterious chains of inland mountains, but merely an element on which adequate meals could be secured. It made me think of Columbus turning back from America because he couldn't see a restaurant, or Cortez repudiating Mexico for fear he would become less stout.

It is perhaps unnecessary to state that the mango played a considerable part in these conversations. Wherever one went, it was agreed, there must be mangoes.

'That's what I go abroad for every winter,' said Sir Frank Filbert. 'Mangoes. I choose the route entirely to that end.'

And then would come the inevitable protest from the other school of fruit-eaters, the followers of the mangosteen.

'Mangoes, yes,' some one would say. 'If you like eating very old sponges soaked in turpentine, by all means eat mangoes. But if you want the most exquisite of all the flavours in the world, you will go where the mangosteen can be had. To the Straits Settlements. To Java.'

'Is there no one,' asked a sunburned listener on the edge of the group, 'to speak a good word for the durian? There's a fruit, if you like!'

'"If you like" indeed. But suppose you don't?' inquired the leader of the mangosteen party.

'It isn't every one's taste, at first, I admit,' said the sunburned man. 'But if you have patience your reward will be great. I began by being revolted; to-day I'd rather eat durian than anything you could offer. That's why I recommend the East.'

'Madeira for me every time,' said another. 'It's less than a week away and not so hot that you can't walk.'

'You must be very fond of rough cobblestones if you go to Madeira to walk,' said another man. 'Besides, it's not hot enough.'

'The thing that bores me about Madeira,' said a third, 'is that it's Portuguese. If there ever was an island made by God to belong to the English, it's Madeira. Look at it. Look where it's situated, on the way to the Cape. Look at its easy distance from England. Look at its residential facilities, its hotels, its bathing, its golf. Obviously an English island; and yet the blooming Portuguese have got it. Absurd, utterly absurd. What can we have been about?'

'You have forgotten Madeira's best fruit,' said a new-comer: 'the custard-apple. That's what I go to Madeira for. It's like—it's like everything except custard and apple—but it's delicious.'

'Well, Jamaica and the pawpaw are good enough for me,' another of these greedy counsellors would confide. 'The pawpaw to eat, golf at Mandeville,

bathing in the Doctor's Cove and no drink restrictions. What?'—for in my club there were still men to say 'What.'

'It's easy,' he continued, 'to get there, and it's cheap and there's no foreign lingo to understand. I go to Jamaica every year directly Christmas is over.'

'Talking about Jamaica,' said some one, 'I can tell you an odd thing. A friend of mine in England inherited an estate there, one of the old plantations dating from the eighteenth century, with a very attractive house. He appointed an agent to keep an eye on the place, and said he would go out and see it as soon as he could. But he put off going year after year until he had a very serious attack of pneumonia and the doctor said a voyage to the West Indies was the best thing for him. So he cabled to his agent and set off.

'His agent met him at Kingston and they had lunch at the hotel and after lunch drove out into the country to see the estate. It was a luxuriant spot, doing very well, and the house fascinated him: one of those low, spreading houses, with verandahs,

all among tropical trees, with strange butterflies and birds and that lovely scarlet flower with tassels that hover—I forget the name.'

'Hibiscus,' I said.

'Yes, hibiscus. Well, he was delighted with everything and decided to live there for a few months every year. Then they drove back to the hotel. And what do you think happened? In the night the famous earthquake occurred and the next morning the house was in ruins. Quick work, what? He had it and it was gone. Just the reverse of Aladdin's palace.'

* * * *

Eventually we settled on Ceylon, where, it appeared, excellent pineapples and a very special prawn could always be counted on.

'If you're not afraid of curry, I think I had better get accommodation for Ceylon,' I said to Jenny.

'I adore curry,' she replied.

* * * *

'Lionel tells me,' said Jenny, 'that before we sail we ought to make a detour to Canchester to see Pooley.'

Pooley was the Hon. Virginia Poole, a war-colleague of Jenny's, with whom I was in partnership in an old curiosity shop called 'The Warming-Pan.'

'Very well,' I said, not at all displeased, for I wanted to see how things were going and how my niece Dorothy, who was Pooley's right-hand, liked her life there.

We found the Hon. Virginia Poole, with her eye-glass in her eye, standing outside the door scanning the street up and down.

'But how marvellous!' she said, having finished embracing her darling Candy. 'You must have left the minute the postman arrived.'

'Left where?' I asked.

'London.'

'We haven't come from London,' I said. 'We've come from Bournemouth, where Mrs. Candover has been convalescing.'

'Then it's a miracle of clairvoyance,' said Pooley, 'because I wrote to you yesterday saying I wanted to see you at once on a most urgent matter. And here you are! Or is it Candy's old friend Lionel?'

she added. 'Of course it is. That's the boy! I'd give anything to have a Lionel of my own. The way he looked after her when we were in France together!'

'What is it?' I asked. 'Will you tell us now or at lunch?'

'I'm lunching here,' she said. 'I never go out now. Dorothy's gone to assemble it. Wait a minute and I'll show you something interesting.'

She went to the back room, unlocked the safe and laid a small parcel before me.

'Open it,' she said.

I removed the paper, and a slender book in two volumes, bound in boards, was revealed. *The Vicar of Wakefield; a Tale supposed to be written by Himself*, 1766.

'So we go in for books too?' I said.

'Of course,' replied my partner. 'Everything is fish, everything is grist. I was at a sale in a small farmhouse at West Meon where there were two or three things I wanted, and noticing the *Vicar* in a bundle of mixed volumes, and having read that Goldsmith is a collector's author, I bought the bundle for six shillings and thought no more about

it until a man with a red moustache drifted in here three days ago to ask the price of a piece of furniture in the window. He said the figure was too high and was drifting out again when he caught sight of the two volumes of the *Vicar* on my desk. He picked up one and examined it, then the other, and, though he made every effort to appear unconcerned, I could see that he had become a different creature. He had been listless and bored up to them; now he was like a terrier when you say "Rats!"

'"How much for this," he asked and tossed the volume in his hand casually back.

'"That?" I said, for I didn't like him and I hated his moustache and I always suspect them when they show any contempt for what they obviously want. Besides his manner had made me suspicious. "Oh, that's mine. It's not part of the stock."

'"You're reading it?" he asked.

'"Re-reading it," I said.

'He could not disguise his disappointment as he went out.

'What ho! I thought, this must be looked into; and I carefully copied out the title pages, number

of pages and all the rest of it, and addressed them to a friend of mine who is an expert in first editions. Then I locked the book up and went out to post the letter and do some errands, leaving Dorothy in charge.

'"Any customers?" I asked when I returned.

'"One man," she said. "He didn't buy anything, but I couldn't get rid of him."

'"Red moustache?" I asked.

'"Yes. He prowled about looking at everything, lifting up things, peering into corners. I even saw him moving the papers on your desk."

'"Good," I said. "He'll come back."

'Sure enough, the next morning, the day before yesterday, he did come back.

'"I hope you've finished re-reading the *Vicar*," he said, "because I should very much like to have that copy. I took a great fancy to it and am prepared to pay a ridiculously high price. I'll give you a pound for it. I like books in their old boards."

'"It's not for sale," I said.

'"Might I look at it again?" he asked. "I didn't have a real chance yesterday."

'"I'm afraid not," I said. "This isn't a bookseller's; this is a furniture shop."

'He went out very slowly and I went to the telephone and got on to my friend in London.

'"What is the *Vicar* worth?" I asked him.

'"Is it in perfect condition?" he asked.

'"Perfect," I said.

'"Well," he said, "good first editions of this book are exceedingly scarce. I find that the last two copies that were sold by auction in London fetched £1,100 and £1,470."'

'Bought by Americans, I suppose,' said Jenny.

'Probably,' said Pooley.

'Go on!' I said. 'Go on!'

'That afternoon,' said Pooley, 'the red-moustached man came in again.

'"You must forgive my persistence," he said; "but I have set my heart on that book. I have these strange compulsions at times and don't mind what they cost me. You may think me as mad as you like, but I can't help it. Look here, I'll give you a hundred pounds for it."

'I shook my head.

'He was astounded. He had never dreamed of a refusal.

' "A hundred pounds is a great deal of money," he said. "Do you think you have the right to reject such an offer? Very useful as capital."

' "Thank you," I said. "I want no financial advice in my business. I prefer to keep the book."

' "Two hundred," he said.

' "No."

' "Five hundred," and he began to take notes from his pocket.

' "No," I said.

'He went out, furious.

'Later in the day a woman came in.

' "I have come on behalf of my husband," she said. "You will remember him in connexion with some trumpery little book, the *Vicar* of something, which he saw here and wants. I must tell you that he is in a very queer state of nerves and it is a serious thing to deny him anything. When he gets these fancies he must be humoured or the consequences may be fatal. Won't you let him have the book for my sake, his poor wife's? You don't know

what I have to put up with. I understand you refused five hundred pounds. Well, I've brought two hundred more. Will you let me have it for seven hundred and take it back with me and set his poor mind at rest? It's robbery, I know, but to see him like this breaks my heart."

'I told her that if she called again to-morrow I'd give her a decision; and then I wrote to you. Of course the story about the man's mental condition is all my eye. He's either a collector or a dealer in old books and knows the value. But the money is good. The point is, how much more ought we to get for it? Shall we realize now or send the book to Sotheby's? I ask you as a business man.'

'If he will go to a thousand,' I said, 'I should let him have it.'

He went to a thousand and paid in notes.

* * * *

'And now,' I said, when the transaction was complete and the money in our bank, 'what was the name of the person at West Meon at whose sale you bought the book?'

'Parsons,' said Pooley, exchanging a quick look

with Jenny: 'a small farmer who had had to give up.'

'Could we trace him?' I asked.

'I suppose so,' said Pooley. 'Through the auctioneers. But why? I don't suppose he's got any more first editions.'

'I merely want him to have half our profits,' I said.

Jenny and the Hon. Miss Poole again exchanged glances.

'What did I tell you?' said Jenny. And then to me, 'Why should he have half the profits? Why shouldn't dealers enjoy their good luck when they get any? You wouldn't halve the profits on a bed or a sideboard or a tallboys or a bureau?'

'No,' I said, 'not unless we found a fortune in a secret drawer. It may not be logical, but I don't feel that we ought to keep all this. I admit that Miss Poole was not taking advantage of any one's ignorance; she bought the book openly at auction. Yet all the same I think it right to let the owner participate. I go farther and say I should think it wrong not to.'

'What did I tell you?' Jenny again remarked to her friend.

'At what rate of profit should a firm's scruples begin?' my partner inquired sweetly. 'The rate of profit in this case is terrific. But suppose I had taken the hundred pounds, should we have surrendered fifty?'

'Please don't cross-examine me,' I said. 'I am going by heart, not head.'

'And in the old furniture business!' said Jenny mockingly.

'Yes,' said Pooley. 'But there must be a point below which even your heart would admit we are entitled to all we make. And remember that we have had bad bargains too. There are lots of things on these premises that won't fetch what we gave for them.'

'True,' I said, 'but the present case is different. It is one to be judged solely on its own merits. We are not booksellers, as you yourself told the red-moustached man. We were having a piece of amazing good fortune outside our own proper sphere. Very well then, let the seller share.'

'Richard is so quixotic,' said Jenny. 'He thinks it fine, but I think it's silly. In a world where honesty and chivalry counted, it might be fine. But in this one. . . . Absurd!' And with a flick of her hand she annihilated a civilization based on compromise.

'You insist on the division?' said Pooley.

'If the transaction belongs to the firm,' I said, 'yes. But if you like to fall back on the line that we are not booksellers, and make the affair a personal one, then I have no more to say, I am out of it. I merely ask you to refund the proportion of the six shillings which the *Vicar* represents.'

'This is terrible,' said Pooley. 'My precious Candy, what am I to do?'

'Let the self-righteous old bully have his way,' said Jenny. 'But of course if you're going to be so strictly just,' she added to me, 'the five hundred ought to reach Parsons through the auctioneers, because they are entitled to their percentage. What about that, Richard?'

'There,' I said, 'my conscience is silent. Auctioneers be blowed!'

'Dear Richard!' said Jenny. 'You see, Pooley, he's not wholly a monster of virtue. He's human here and there.'

'Well,' said my partner, 'that's settled, and we're a good five hundred up. But don't ask me to find Parsons and hand him his half. I can't do with sob-stuff. Dorothy shall be the Blue Bird.'

* * * *

Disdaining the coward's short cut to Marseilles by train, we took the whole voyage, and the Bay recognized our courage by behaving like a gentleman's lake. The Mediterranean, which, in spite of its disarming name, can rage and destroy, was calm too, so that the Canal, instead of being a relief from agitated waves, was merely a continuation of placidity. A fat man in a fez, riding a very small donkey, to which he was grossly out of proportion, along the Port Said embankment, was the first unmistakable and authentic sign of the East, fortified at Aden by strings of camels.

In between came the blessed heat and my first sight of that epoch-making eminence, Mount Sinai. I had always thought of Sinai as an isolated peak

rising sheer from the plain; it was a shock to be told by the captain that it was merely one of a long imposing range, all very high and rocky and, I should guess, difficult for any but a stern Israelite law-giver to ascend. Mountains should be separate and pointed, like Vesuvius, or that rock with the lighthouse on it at Cape St. Vincent.

Still, there it was, the historic peak, and here, in a glass-case in the saloon, were two or three dozen Bibles and prayer-books, each containing the Commandments which Moses brought down with him from that one-sided interview, centuries ago. A link with the past, indeed, while the wireless reports of the Stock Exchange, pinned up afresh every morning, indicated that the Golden Calf was still not wholly disregarded.

Among the various problems which confront one on a voyage, not the least is, how does the time slip by? One wakes burdened with the weight of hours that must be disposed of before night and the return to bed; and behold, bed-time is here before two chapters of your novel have been read. Sleep is, of course, the answer. The poet's phrase about

the sea being the mother of men had probably a mystical meaning, but the way in which she soothes us to sleep and rocks the cradle is literal too. Every other deck-chair, at any rate on our vessel, was the abode of almost unceasing slumber. And when we were awake, what an odd sight for the gods, I sometimes thought—all these vessels going up and down the waters of the globe with rows of people in chairs looking the same way at nothing! It was as though the walls of a theatre had suddenly disintegrated, leaving the audience in position.

Certain of the minor problems of a voyage could be summarized in the question 'How long will it take that little sociable man who talks to every one to get round to us?' Another question is 'Why are the porpoises always on the other side?' And yet one more: 'Why cannot ship-builders build ships that do not creak and shudder and bang?,' with its corollary, 'Why don't captains hear these noises and send some one to stop them?'

But perhaps the most perplexing is, 'Why do men become stewards, and women stewardesses?' So far as my observation goes, the lives of stewards

and stewardesses are without repose or alleviation. They come on duty at dawn and are still busy late at night. Where they sleep it is perhaps better not to inquire. Often they seem to eat standing up. When it is rough they are expected to be superhuman. It is certainly not the lure of foreign travel that calls them forth, for out of some scores of stewards whom I have questioned not one ever went ashore anywhere. For stewards, in vain are snares spread in harbours by the guileful. Sailors may fall, but not stewards. Sailors may find some compensation for the hard life of the sea in the relaxation that is offered in every port; stewards neither caress nor imbibe.

Yet the post of steward is, I understand, much in demand. Applicants stand in queues. Can it be that they are escaping from something on land that is worse? And is it true, as the ocean legend has it, that in the questing, anxious seagulls keeping up so miraculously against the wind with the ship's twenty knots, hardly moving of a muscle, the spirits of dead stewards are re-embodied?

I have omitted from the occupations of the voy-

ager such side activities as eating, drinking, and trying not to hear the pitiless band. What music they play! It is certainly true that good tunes when they die go to sea.

There are also the opportunities given by ships of marvelling at the capricious way in which the Almighty distributes His gifts, the least athletic passengers being the most skilful at deck quoits and the stupidest the best players of Bridge.

Apart from the consolations afforded by sleep, reading, the study of mankind and my own efforts towards her entertainment, Jenny was further safeguarded from ennui by the contiguity of her maid Meakin, who was never far from her mistress's deckchair, should she be needed, and rarely failed to bring a piece of news. I am not referring to the contents of the wireless bulletins which were to be found pinned to the wall here and there on the vessel. Nothing so insipid as parliamentary crises, floods in the Thames valley, deaths of eminent men, bankruptcies of financial magnates. What Meakin had to tell touched upon our own immediate surroundings, and more particularly on the human ele-

ment around us. The other and less familiar element, on which we rose and fell, might be teeming with strange matter—from flying-fish and whales to floating wreckage and sister ships—but in vain.

Meakin might cast a superficial glance at the horizon now and then, or even condescend to look with longer consideration at the sun sinking in a magnificent conflagration, but her own special eye was reserved for men and women, preferably together; for in her was concentrated in essence the doubt, common to all married women and to the more determined of spinsters, that the union of others, especially the happier couples about her, had not been sanctioned by law.

'Those two over there,' she would say, 'have never been married, I'll be bound. They're too gay.'

Meakin herself was almost ferociously single: summarizing her repugnance to matrimony and the male in the phrase 'None of that,' but this circumstance did not limit her interest in the affairs of others.

'That second officer, I was telling you about, 'm, turns out to be married after all. I thought he had a married look, and his laugh rang hollow when I taxed him with it. Fancy being ashamed of a wife, poor thing. She lives in Southend and they've got two children. And him telling me he was a bachelor!'

'It looks almost as though ships were invented in order that husbands might get away from their responsibilities,' she remarked once. 'So far as I can gather, there's hardly an unmarried man on the ship. Wicked, I call it. What did they marry for, if that's the way they treat their poor wives, although I dare say if they're that kind of man the wives are better without them.'

Again: 'I've found out something dreadful, 'm, about the young gentleman with the panama hat with the red ribbon—he's just coming along now. You've seen how he's been making up to the young lady with the yellow hair who always screams while she plays games? Well, it seems he's on his way to Sydney to marry his fiancy, who is waiting for him, and the girl with yellow hair is on her way to

Ceylon to marry a tea-planter who is waiting for her. They've been engaged for two years, and look at her now! The one thing I'm looking forward to is seeing how she meets her future husband when he comes on board. How she'll have the face! But there, the minxes!'

Again: 'I think the sea's awful, I do, the way it throws people together. And I'd no idea of it till this voyage started. You know, 'm, it began almost at once, in the very Thames's mouth. How could I know, since the only other time I was ever on a ship was when I went down to Southampton to see a friend off to America? Oh, and a funny thing happened there, I remember. While we were talking, the Chief Engineer came up and said something joking to us, and he was Scotch. And—what do you think, 'm?—the Chief Engineer of this ship is Scotch too. Isn't that a coincidence?'

With one or two other ladies' ladies, escorted by a gallant swain or so, Meakin went ashore at Aden to see the mermaids; and thus received a shock which is unlikely completely to wear off even should she live to be a centenarian.

I did not hear her report at first hand but gather that her dominating feeling was indignation. Shame too, of course, in so censorious a moralist; but chiefly indignation that such things should be included in the creation. So near the Bible country too; the Red Sea and Egypt and the Holy Land only just over there, she was told. A few more such eye-openers and the Church might lose one of its staunchest supporters.

* * * *

The chief deck steward, one of the most communicative and human of all the officials in white, was my principal male friend on the boat. As he was usually the soul of impulsive candour, I was surprised one morning to watch him eyeing me nervously from a distance, starting towards my chair with opening lips and then retreating on some obviously invented errand in another direction. This was before Jenny had arrived from her cabin, to be established by both of us, with Meakin assisting, on her couch.

At last deciding that I could be trusted with the news, he stood before me.

'Do you mind,' he asked, 'if I tell you a rum dream I had last night?'

'Not at all,' I said. 'But you've been a long time thinking about letting me into the secret.'

'Yes, I have,' he said; 'although I don't know how you know it. But there's a reason for that. I wouldn't tell any one else because of that reason, but you like a joke so much that I want you to be in this. You couldn't be properly in it, you see, unless you knew the fax; and the principal fact is that I'm a widower. No,' he added hastily, seeing that I was about to say 'I'm sorry to hear that'; indeed I had already got as far as 'I'm—,' 'no, there's no need to sympathize. I was well rid of her. So was the world. She was a bad lot. She led me a dance, I can tell you; spent all my savings; carried on something cruel and then bolted. But before I could see a lawyer, next time we were at Tilbury, about getting rid of her, she died. God's mercy, if you like.'

The needs of other passengers taking him away at this moment, I was free to ponder on the whole delicate question of sailors' marriages, whether ad-

mirals or furnace-hands. Given sufficient strength of character, periodical partings ought to make for happiness; the difficulty being to decide on the right length of their duration, holding the balance between familiarity's lost opportunities for breeding contempt and the veracity of the old (and, I fancy, disputable) saying that 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' which, like all proverbs, has an opposite: 'Out of sight, out of mind.'

Certainly of the many marriages that I had the bachelor's opportunity of observing, not a few would have prospered more merrily if the husbands and wives could now and then take a holiday from each other. Or such was the superficial deduction.

'If you would really like to hear my dream,' the deck steward resumed, 'here goes. I dremp I met my wife and we had another of our angry turn-ups. Although I knew she was dead, all right, she seemed real enough and answered back like a good 'un. I forget what we quarrelled about, but I shall never forget the end of it. She went to the door, held it open all ready to bang it, just like she used to do

—and my word, couldn't she bang 'em!—and cried out "Oh, go to Hell!"

'And what do you think I said in reply? This is the whole point of the dream. I said, "No, you didn't ought to say 'Go to Hell'; you ought to say 'Come to Hell!' " And I woke up, laughing at being so clever. "Not 'Go to Hell,' " I shouted at her: " 'Come to Hell'—that's what you mean." '

* * * *

When at last we reached Colombo I was sorry. Ceylon was an unknown country, it is true, and there it was, with all its strangeness, waiting to be explored; and yet I would rather stay on board than feel any variety of solid ground beneath my feet. One can get very fond of a ship and its lazy, punctual routine: a routine which hypnotizes, and in which one takes comfort and refuge, as dogs do. Just as a dog resents any change in the habits of a house, so did I resent the impending change and disturbance: the necessity of disembarking and losing for ever my cabin, my deck-chair, my steward, even the facetiousness of the captain, which admits of neither appeal nor redress. But even more did I

wish to retain the sea and its beneficence. Speaking as one who all his life, on land, has either just had a cold, or is having a cold, or is expecting a cold, I cannot be too grateful to the Indian Ocean, and indeed to all other tropical oceans, where colds are not.

But Colombo was there; and Jenny, who has no such dog-like characteristics but longs always for novelty, was impatient: and Meakin, in her own phrase, was 'fed up' with liners. Moreover there were rooms set apart for us at the Galle Face, and —well—did we want to go to Australia? With no disrespect to that warm-hearted Dominion we—at any rate all of us—did not.

Jenny's mind was set on elephants; and Meakin's mind was set on dry and stabilized land, at once if not sooner; while I, I didn't count. If I seemed to hear the bat hitting the ball on the Sydney cricket ground, well, I must do what Ulysses did and get some wax.

It was to Ceylon that we were bound: Ceylon, the Isle of Spices, or the Spicy Isle as it used to be called, because it was alleged that wafts of perfume

met the mariner when still far from its shores and drew him thither by the nose. No such aromatic invitation had come our way, but perhaps the wind was in the wrong quarter. Legends rarely work out right.

To me, having now first-hand knowledge of it, Ceylon is not the Isle of Spices but the Isle of Sunshine; for the sun, during the dry season, can be counted upon to diffuse warmth as surely as to rise and set; and this, to an inhabitant of Great Britain, is an indescribably seducing idea. In April it is said to be too hot; but in the winter, the period of our sojourn, it is right. As a protection against the rays one must, it is true, even then convert one's figure to the semblance of a giant mushroom, although nothing would induce Jenny to do this: rather any sunstroke than look like that, she said. But at five o'clock, when the Cingalese let their long, black tresses fall and glisten over their shoulders, the helmet is exchanged for a soft hat. The fragrant darkness comes with swiftness, bringing with it the sinister cries of the flying foxes as they anxiously cross the sky, and the glint of the fire-

flies' fugitive sparks, so impossible to anticipate. And a magnificent sunset is the rule. That is why the Galle Face Hotel is unique: the whole pageant is punctually unrolled.

In addition to the Spicy Isle and the Isle of Spices, Ceylon had other names. The fact that I call it the Isle of Sunshine will never be remembered, but it is a record in all the books that it is the Serendib of the *Arabian Nights*, the scene of Sindbad's adventures; that by its first Indian conquerors it was known as the Resplendent Isle; by the Buddhists, as the Pearl on India's brow; by the Chinese, as the Isle of Jewels; by the Greeks, as the Island of Hyacinths and Rubies; while Mahomedans 'assigned it to the exiled parents of mankind as a new elysium to console them for the loss of Paradise.' No wonder then that every day there are passenger ships in Colombo's harbour.

* * * *

Having much time to spare in the hottest hours of the day, I dipped into the authorities, finding that the history of Ceylon is common to that of all desirable islands: that is to say, it contains much

aggression. Just as an ancient Briton would be very difficult to find in England to-day, where our veins contain so many corpuscles imported into them under successive conquests, so are there very few pure Cingalese. I was told of a diminishing tribe of aboriginals called Veddahs, who may be found in the jungles in the east, shooting their food with bows and arrows; but we did not see them. Instead we saw the descendants of the immigrants who came in from the valley of the Ganges with Wijayo in the sixth century before Christ; and the descendants of the other Indian settlers from the south, the Malabars, who quickly followed, and are now called Tamils, worshippers not of Buddha but of Hindoo divinities. All the rickshaw boys are Tamils.

And then there are a certain number of Mahomedans, chiefly from Malay; and the many half-castes, products of union with the English, who ousted the Dutch at the end of the eighteenth century; with the Dutch, who ousted the Portuguese; and with the Portuguese who, although they may lose control, never allow themselves to

be eliminated, so powerful is their blood. Portuguese, names are still prominent in all Ceylon—sometimes the name of Da Silva seems to be omnipresent—while the most commanding building in Colombo, dominating a hill and far more noticeable than any temple, mosque, English church or Dutch kirk, is the cathedral of the determined faith which the Portuguese brought with them. All the Western sects, and I include the Salvation Army among them, have sunk roots in Ceylon—to the serious detriment at any rate of the picturesque costumes of the country—but the activities of none are so noticeable as those of Rome, whose priests make a gallant struggle to reconcile the cassock with the solar topee. For some curious reason the solar topee has a de-spiritualizing effect on every face, including no doubt my own (I know that I recoiled horror-struck from mirrors), but, oddly enough, particularly so on those that are coloured. Quite mild white men, such as myself, can, in these monstrous hats, suggest authority and even insolence; dusky men thus covered become objects of suspicion.

The Dutch may have gone, but you find their grave, solid buildings—their churches and their forts—all along the south-west coast. There are churches in Colombo and Galle that might have been transplanted from any town in Holland, and in Colombo you pass the old cemetery filled with the neglected graves of the dead and otherwise forgotten Mynheers and their wives, who lie under crumbling stones between open railings beyond which the ceaseless traffic of the city they won and lost goes ever on. Dutch names perpetuate the old régime—such as Bloomendaal and Rosendaal; while the district behind the War Memorial on the Galle Face lawn in Colombo is still called Slave Island, because it was there that the Dutch kept their servitors, and the mixed descendants of these old Colonists are still known as Burghers.

Colombo is unique in my experience in combining in one building, very ingeniously and thriftily, the functions of a clock-tower and a lighthouse. By day you look upon this structure, which is at the meeting of four cross-roads in the thick of the town, with a traffic policeman at its foot, as you

would look at any clock-tower in any main street and think no more about it; but at evening, at the moment the sun's rim dips and the dark prepares to stride, the beacon springs to life and shines on, through its revolving shutter, through the night: a thing of romance.

Colombo provided me also with a new cricketing experience. I have seen in my life much cricket, although far from enough, but never until then had I watched a man make a hundred on Christmas Eve. This was the only cricket I saw, except for desultory games on the Galle Face lawn, in one of which the participators were a very small boy, in; his father, bowling and fielding anything in front; and his grandfather, with a big cigar, keeping wicket and making an unsportsmanlike use of his skirts. Could one see such a sight in England, the home of the game?

The Galle Face Hotel, which was our headquarters, has its proud position on the edge of the sea, at the far end of the Galle Face lawn, with the fishermen before its windows all day, in their outrigged catamarans, and at evening, as I have said,

the pyrotechny of the descending and descended sun. It is an amusing hotel and, as soon as the persistent and not to be abashed jewellers in the hall have realized that you are not a customer and never will be a customer, comfortable. It is amusing, because nearly every day a shipload of visitors is projected upon it for lunch, thus providing an entertainment outside that which the island itself offers. They arrive voluble and excited, in motor-cars or rickshaws, the jewellers' natural prey, haggle, cock their tails, eat, and are away again. Mostly Australians. Once they have gone the hotel settles down to its own life once more, with the sea's sighing and the chatter of the waiting rickshaw boys just outside, and voices of children on the Galle Face lawn, coming in on the hot air.

Except at Colombo, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya (shortened in pronunciation to Nuralia) there are few hotels in Ceylon, for the very good reason that there are few towns big enough to sustain them. A system of Government rest-houses has therefore been devised, for the convenience of travellers. Those who arrange their itineraries in advance

inform the rest-houses of their approach, and are thus, in time, sure of beds and meals; but the reply to the sudden telegram often states that there is no accommodation. Impulsive capricious travellers who take their chance can meet with many disappointments, for there are not many rooms, and food is difficult to keep. Ceylon thus is not a very simple country to tour in.

These rest-houses, although somewhat primitive in their way, serve their purpose. The best of them are on the coast, at Negombo and Chilaw for instance, where fresh fish is served. One of my club friends had commended the prawns; and he was right. Nothing could be better than the prawns, fried, at Negombo. Up north, where it is wilder, one eats what the shikari has been able to shoot, such as wild-boar (curried), jungle fowl (roast), and venison (hashed), while sometimes there is fish from a river or tank. As there is seldom any ice, rest-house drinks are tepid. Although plates in Ceylon are always hot, meat is usually nearly cold, even in the best hotels, and vegetables are always cold. Owing to the heat, most meat is tough; but

one can make out with fish, curry and fruit. The fish are few and monotonous: the seer, a rather coarse poor relation of the salmon, being the most persistent. Bananas and coco-nuts can always be obtained: little delicate bananas which make it impossible ever again to eat the pithy plantains that are sold in England under that name.

It was at the rest-house at Negombo that the bad quarter of an hour, before a fish luncheon was ready, was whiled away for us by a juggler. At the oddest times and places in Ceylon a man carrying a round basket will approach the foreigner, lift the lid a little way to disclose a coiled cobra within, and offer to charm it. Then and there he is prepared to do so, even in the midst of traffic: squatting on whatever ground offers and blowing on his melancholy bulbous pipe till the poor mutilated reptile, robbed of its character and its venom, extends its head, inflates its terrible hood, sways from side to side, and is at last coiled around the juggler's neck. But that is only the preliminary. The real performance consists of conjuring, for not only do these artists lift the lid and say 'Cobra,' but they

proffer a little dried chip and say 'Mango'—referring to the famous mango trick which is the culmination of any performance. I must say that the old fellow at Negombo did it exceedingly well, producing, after many contortions behind a piece of sacking, from this dried chip a shrub with vigorous leaves and a root that had to be torn from the soil. For the 'Galla, galla,' of the Port Said magicians he substituted a babble of his own, interspersed with scraps of English, French and German. Considering that he was only two yards away, seated on the ground in the full light of day and without accessories, his deceptions were marvellous.

I shall always remember the Galle Face Hotel for its bodyguard of crows. This, the omnipresent bird of Ceylon, differs from the crow of India and Jamaica in being both smaller and bolder. He does not keep his eye on the city from the sky, as those sinister fowls for ever do, soaring and watching, but descends in noisy flocks to the streets or makes his observations from roofs and window ledges. The Galle Face Hotel is entirely under his claws; so much so that on returning to my bedroom from the

bath I always found three or four of him finishing the toast left over from the morning tea, or in the act of bearing away the rind of the papaya. I began in time to feel very like Elijah—but with the rôles reversed, for although the birds were in attendance it was I who provided the fare.

* * * *

'Listen to this,' said Jenny, holding out several sheets of note-paper covered with scrawl. 'Here's a letter from Doddles. About the "Picnic." Do you want to hear it?'

'No,' I said.

'Then listen. "Darling Jenny Wren, I hope you are booming and that it is hot but not too hot where you are. I still have remains of the neuralgia I caught under the electric fans at the Galle Face three years ago, but then you are different, you thrive on draughts. Here it has been as beastly as usual, freezing and raining and carrying on in the way that made Britons what we are, whatever that is. I suppose I ought to know, being in the midst of it and not dodging the winter like some we wot of

who have more good luck than patriotism. You needn't answer this.

'"Now to business. You and your alleged friend, who hates me, don't deny it, left me at a very critical time and just when I needed you most, yourself in particular, because I was choosing my staff and I'm the worst judge of ladies' faces in the world. Ladies! How sick I am of the word!

'"The advertisement in *The Times* Personal Column, that tower of strength, ran thus:

> For middle hours of the day only. Wanted ladies to act as attendants in new West-end lunch-room run on novel lines.

Having no one else to talk this over with, and I being lost unless I can talk with some one, I consulted the lift-man at the flats. He was very wise. I had originally written 'young ladies,' but he stopped that. 'Do you really want 'em young?' he asked. I said I wanted to get good results. 'Then don't say "young," ' he said. 'Say just "ladies." If you say "young ladies," the old 'uns will keep away; but if you say just "ladies," both lots will roll up,

and then you'll be able to select at your ease. You've got to have one or two pretty ones, of course, just to pull the gents in, but if they flirt with them and neglect their job you'll lose on the swings what you make on the roundabouts. And there you are.'

'"Well, there was no doubt about their rolling up. I interviewed dozens before I completed the staff, and have since had to make some changes, for one or two were too attentive to the gents, and one pinched the till and one arrived slightly tight. But we're all fixed now and you can assure your Richard that he needn't fear for his capital.

'"Right up to Christmas we were too busy, for three or four days running clean out of grub, and then too busy again for the two or three days before the New Year when there was another rush of shoppers either changing their presents or hastily buying new ones for the people who had remembered them but they had forgotten. Is that grammar? Anyhow, they poured into us and spread famine.

'"I have been making a point of asking a few of them every day how they heard of the 'Picnic' and nearly every one says that a friend told them.

I've always thought that talk is the best form of advertising, and this seems to prove it. But of course you must deliver the goods first, or the talk will take the wrong turning."'

Jenny paused.

'Must you read any more?' I asked.

'Of course. Why not? It's about your investment, isn't it?'

'All right,' I said. 'But couldn't you cut the parts where she's funniest?'

'You've never been fair to Doddles,' said Jenny. 'She's a very good sort. Also, she's your partner. Now listen again and don't be spoilt and fretful.

'"Our dear customers have been women, mostly, the blessed balm of a man's face being only too rare; and then it was a husband's or a flirt's. So it's pretty certain that we can't count on the male shop-assistants of the neighbourhood, as we hoped and as we shall need to in the summer months. I suppose sandwiches and coffee, tea or lemonade, are not enough for regular workers. For their gross palates chops and steaks and beer.

'"If you want to retain any respect for your

fellow-creatures, don't open a shop. Of course there are nice people who behave themselves and get on with it, but the others can be holy terrors. I pass over the thieves without further remark, particularly as we have no means of checking them. But eating four sandwiches and only paying for three has become a new industry since you left London. Still, the dishonest customers are tolerable; it's those who make the place a rest-house, and sit on and on, occupying precious space for an hour, and all for a shilling or less—it's they who break your heart.

'"Also the people who buttonhole you and ask you why you don't do this and that differently. There was actually a woman one day who said we ought to keep oysters. 'If you opened an oyster bar,' she said, 'I'd come in for half a dozen every Thursday on my way to my Bridge lesson.' 'That's a very valuable suggestion,' I said, 'and it shall receive our gravest consideration.'

'"But it wasn't oysters that she really wanted, but, like hundreds of others, tiddley. If we had a licence, or cared to send out for drinks, we could

make a small fortune. Sherry is what they are after, most of them. But I'm against serving alcohol, even though it would pay. It would alter the character of the place: we should get a different sort of customer.

'"We began with equal supplies of each variety of sandwich but very soon had to bend to the iron law, as my banker brother would say, of supply and demand. Chicken and ham were the winners at first, with bloater paste a strong runner-up, but then steadily but surely Gentlemen's Relish overhauled them and remained first favourite. It's rather a bore, because it's dear, but we are not going to be mingy. If they want Gentlemen's Relish they shall have it. Which reminds me of a good joke that one of our few male customers made. While he was eating a dozen or so sandwiches we exchanged a few remarks about them and I said that during the War the quality of the stuff had declined, 'Yes,' he said, 'it was Temporary Gentlemen's Relish then.'

'"Well, dear, I hope you are really strong again and coming back soon. London is very dull without you and there are a thousand questions that my

partner will have to answer, if he still wishes to be in the business. If not I will pay him out and run it alone. I like it." '

'There,' said Jenny, 'that's all that matters. There's a little more, about clothes and racing—she's been lucky over the sticks, she says—and about one of the ladies who misbehaved, but I'll spare you that. So you see I was right in saying that I am really a business woman.'

'I don't see that,' I said. 'Your original scheme was nonsense. It was not until I came in and knocked it down and built something new and sensible on the ruins that it was any good and made money.'

'Yes,' said Jenny, 'but "The Chicken Pie" had to be thought of first. And that was my idea. You mustn't be conceited, Richard. It's not your line.'

* * * *

Colombo seen from the ship is not impressive; nor, outside the buried cities, is architecture noteworthy anywhere in Ceylon. Ceylon's beauty is the beauty of nature—of palm trees, mountains and

rivers; of palm trees, lagoons and rice fields; of palm trees, butterflies and blossoms, and of sunsets of amazing and even frightening splendour. Now and then the white dome of a temple, gleaming amid the greenery, alights sweetly on the eye, and there are agreeable flashes of colour among the clothes of the wayfarers who walk ever along the roads. (Closing my eyes and thinking of Ceylon, that is what I see: the Cingalese walking, on both sides of the road, slowly, gracefully, independently: walking, walking, walking.)

But the principal charm of the Isle of Spices is natural, and no small ingredient of it is her slender upright men and her straight-limbed carefree children, all with shining teeth. The women who bore the children, seemingly fully fledged, you rarely see; but as, from the back, all the men appear to be women, and as the invisible women are drudges, the loss is bearable.

Ceylon is indeed a man's country. All the servants are men, all the shopkeepers, all the walkers; and all wear camboys or skirts. Never were bipeds better built to show off trousers to advantage; and

none wear them. Not only does one see few women, who hide in the obscurity of the windowless huts, but there is a gap in the ranks of the males too. Tiny boys with nothing on; slender boys up to, say, twelve, with something on; youths and young men, in skirts; middle-aged men and old men, perhaps prematurely aged, in skirts: all these you see. But where are the boys between twelve and eighteen, and where the the men between twenty-five and forty? Or are they all there, the fine gradations of developments as we in the West know them being lost under the ravening pitiless sun? Upon the women of the East the heat is, of course, hardest. Some splendid full-bosomed dark beauties in rich silks fluttering in the monsoon I saw, descending from cars on the Galle Face lawn, but they were rich and enfranchized. The roadside women are either girls or crones.

Whether a man in Ceylon is naked but for a loin-string because he is a road-mender, or a road-mender because he is naked—such can be the niceties of caste—I did not ascertain. But the fact remains that the road-menders are naked and that

they have the most beautiful backs and shoulders. The trite comparison between them and bronze statues is continually in the mind.

Long hair is the rule for men—the older ones, still true to tradition, fixing it with a yellow tortoiseshell comb, which, with the tight little bun at the back, adds to the feminine illusion. All the older waiters at the Galle Face wear these combs: dear, thoughtful old men, spick and span in their white robes; but the young, I was told, despise their fathers' customs. The habit of the young all the world over.

Except for the shaven heads of the Buddhist priests, in their yellow and orange draperies, you see no baldness. Also you see no bowlegs. Nor are there cripples. Three I counted in many, many miles, and perhaps a dozen blind beggars with staff and cup; all but two, who were young men, with grey beards. Although beggars are not a blot on the country, Colombo has quite an army of urchins who hold out their hands with a certain shy ingratiatingness to those who sit in cars. One very small one I shall not soon forget, outside the general

post office. 'Very poor boy,' he said; 'farder' (that was me) 'give money.' He then sang to farder the chorus of 'Tipperary' and stretched forth his tiny palm again. 'Very poor boy: farder give money.' Who could resist?

The papers contain gruesome accounts of assaults and even assassinations by the toddy-inflamed; but I saw only one drunken man, who was very comfortably tucked away in a bullock cart with his family seated about or on him. And I saw only one ebullition of anger. The Cingalese, if not actually laughing, have a contented air and seem to be on the friendliest terms with each other. As for the children, they are always merry and never anything but of an adorable comeliness. In all Ceylon the only child's tears that I witnessed, the only cries that I heard, were those of a little English boy dragged untimely from a fancy-dress party in a Kandy hotel.

Except on the racecourses our friend the horse is not seen. Three victorias I counted in Colombo and two ponies in Kandy, but never another: the

motor, the little humped bulls and bullocks and the rickshaw men take their place. The rickshaw is much used: too often, one feels—noting the discrepancy between fare and steed—by the fat. They are employed also for long distances, such as from Colombo for the eight miles to Mount Lavinia, a favourite resort where tea may be had in the windiest hotel I was ever in, and, if you are lucky, elephants may be seen bathing. Sixteen miles is a long distance for a 'boy' to trot. To take part in a funeral procession in a rickshaw is a real test of facial expression, the mourner is so unavoidably on view. I saw funerals of all kinds: rich, in Colombo, the poor in the country, and once we were held up by the obsequies of a policeman, whose cortège was preceded by a wood-wind band of three.

It is not the horse, nor the rickshaw, nor petrol that is the real transport power of Ceylon, but the bullock. This loyal creature, although no bigger than a Jersey calf at home, pulls considerable loads, to which are added their owners and often a friend or two, and keeps up a gallant trot. I saw no sign

of cruelty on the part of the drivers, who, having no reins, steer by digs and persuasion; nor do the Cingalese chauffeurs, kept back by the tendency of everything in Ceylon to hold the middle of the road, resort to Western irony or abuse. Good feeling prevails; live and let live.

* * * *

Walking on the Galle Face lawn one morning, I was conscious of a woman's hand waving from a rickshaw trotting along the sea wall towards the hotel. Could the signal be meant for me? Surely not. But it was. After much prodding of her human steed, the passenger induced him to stop rather than accelerate, which had been his first idea, and, reaching earth again, she almost leapt at me in her friendly eagerness. It was Posy Crystal, the famous singer whom I had last seen on the morning when she renounced my nephew Vivian and accepted an Australian tour. She looked older, I thought, and worn; but her warm impulsive heart beat as strongly as ever.

'I was never so surprised in my life,' she said;

'you could have knocked me down with a cocktail straw. What on earth are you doing here? I'm on my way back from Australia, and all that bunch in the other go-carts are fellow-passengers. We're only here for a few hours, but every one said we must go ashore and have lunch at the Bald-faced hotel. What a funny name!"

I corrected her.

'Oh, gall?' she said. 'I thought it was bald. I was too seedy to land on the way out or I should have known. Anyway there's a "Bald-faced Stag" somewhere in England where I had a drink once. Never mind what this one's called so long as there's something good to eat and the floor keeps still. Do you like steamers? I don't.'

By this time I had paid off the rickshaw boy and we were walking over the turf.

'Have you had a good tour?' I asked.

'Very,' she said. 'I'm rolling, but not so much as that horrible ship. How I hate the sea! The only part of this voyage one enjoys is the Suez Canal. That's a nice respectable piece of water. You've got

friends in the hotel, I suppose, and we shan't be able to talk, so let's sit down for a little. It's very early.'

We sat on one of the seats facing her detested element.

'Did Vivian write to you?' I asked.

'No,' she said. 'At any rate I didn't get any letters. I didn't want any, either. I wanted to forget him. You were quite right, I suppose, to break it up like that.'

What could I reply? I did not agree with her, but how could I tell her so?

'I shall never interfere in any one's life again,' I said. 'Not intentionally.'

'Don't you think all that kind of thing is out of our hands?' she asked. 'It's part of the scheme. I always think everything is bound up with everything else, though why it should be is beyond me. Vivian and I had to get fond of each other and you had to butt in. Just like a piece of webbing, all joined. Tell me about him,' she added. 'I can bear it. That part of my life is all over. I was very ill in Australia or I should have been back long since,

and while I was ill I became what you would call a philosopher. So tell me everything.'

I told her. 'But what you've got to realize,' I said at the end of the story, 'is that when you reach London again he'll be waiting for you. He thinks he has merely to show himself to be taken back. What do you say to that?"

'It's too hard,' she said. 'It isn't right. Why did I go all those thousand uncomfortable miles to Australia? It wasn't for the money. I was earning much better money at home and I was running the risk of losing my real home public too. It was just to escape from Vivi and play the game. You know it, don't you?' She took my hands. 'You know it.'

'Of course,' I said. 'I was partly responsible. And I was miserable too.'

'I might as well have stayed,' she said. 'O Vivi, Vivi, he oughtn't to be behaving like this. He oughtn't to want it both ways. Directly I went off like that he ought to have forgotten me and played the game too. But now he's broken two women's hearts and expects to do what he likes with the bits.

It's frightening, it's terrible. But I won't take him back. I couldn't. It would be wicked. I should always be thinking of that other poor thing.'

'It's a wretched business,' I said. 'And not less so because he's not really bad, he's only weak.'

'Oh, that weakness!' cried Posy. 'Men's weakness! Haven't I seen it at work all my life? Give me badness all the time. You can deal with badness; but weakness cuts into your very vitals and makes you weak too. Don't they know that, the blighters.'

She dabbed at her eyes and repaired the damage from her vanity-case. Vanity? Poor Posy!

'Well,' she said with a laugh. 'I didn't get off the ship to cry with you or to cry at all. What strange things happen! Here among all these weird black men in shimmies to find an old friend like you and be pitchforked suddenly into the old miseries. What a world! Let's go and find the bar. I should like a long one and then I must join my friends. They'll think I've been abducted by a rajah.'

'But I want you to have lunch with Mrs. Can-

dover and me,' I said. 'You must get your friends to excuse you.'

'What is she like?' Posy asked, with a suspicion of hostility.

'She's like you,' I said. 'Genuine.'

'All right,' she said, 'that's settled. I'll let you off the drink and meet you at lunch time. I suppose she knows about me?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I consult her about everything.'

'But she won't talk about it.'

'Not unless you begin,' I said.

Nor did we discuss Vivian or marriage or divorce or any such things; instead Posy rattled on about Australia and the audiences there as though her mind had not a care. She was very funny too with all those little additions to the curry that are served in Ceylon: the powdered coco-nut and the onions; and the venerable waiter's back hair, neatly fastened with its tortoiseshell comb, fascinated her.

'I had one of those combs when I was only that tall,' she said, extending her hand to a height of three feet from the ground. 'And I haven't seen one since. The old darling. Bless his heart! Talking

of children,' she went on, 'I've got a peach of a new song. It's been a riot in Australia. I come on as an old-fashioned woman, not ugly or old or vinegarish, but just jolly and sensible. There are four or five other girls on the stage, and one's swinging a golf club, and one's changing a gramophone needle, and one's lighting a new cigarette from the last, and one's shaking a cocktail. I sing a verse to each of them and at the end they all join in the chorus. And what do you think the title is? "Shall We Join the Babies?" And at the end of the last chorus, which we sing in a whisper, we all put our fingers on our lips and go out on tiptoe because the night-nursery's next door. How do you think that will go in London?'

'It will be a change,' I said.

'By the way,' she asked, giving me an expressive glance, 'has Vivian——'

'No,' I said. 'Fortunately.'

'Is Annie with you?' I asked.

Annie was her maid and dresser.

'Yes,' she said, 'but she wouldn't come ashore.

She heard there were elephants. Elephants in the Zoo or in circuses or music-halls she can put up with; but she says she doesn't hold with them out of their right place and wild. But she's all right, she's made a lot of friends among the stewards.'

'Does she like the sea?'

'No, no more than I do. Why, will you believe it, she was asked once to stay at Ventnor for a week-end with some friends, but when she got to Portsmouth and found it meant crossing the water she came back by the next train.'

'Then how did you get her to Australia?'

'Because I was going too,' I suppose. 'She's devoted to me; at any rate, she wouldn't have let me go without her. But you can't think how happy she is to be on the way back. She said to me this morning, "That there Red Sea is going to be the last of these horrors, I'm told. And then it'll get colder and colder until we fetch up in London all in the middle of the real winter. Among the dear old slush, and the reflections of the lamps on the asphalt, and the buses roaring along, and the evening

papers being cried, and very like a lovely pea-soup fog. No one," she said, "was ever so homesick as what I am." '

'I'm not sure I don't feel a little bit that way myself,' I said.

'Richard!' cried Jenny reprovingly. 'He's not a good traveller, Miss Crystal,' she added to Posy. 'His heart's in his own land all the time. He likes foreign places and strange sights for a few minutes, and then he's pining for home again and routine: *The Times*, the post and his books. Now I can settle down abroad much more completely and naturally than that, although it's true I miss my dog.'

'Talking of dogs,' said Posy. 'I wonder such a lot what has become of mine. I left him with some friends and they haven't written for months. If it weren't for those potty quarantine restrictions, I'd have brought him.'

'What is he,' asked Jenny.

'A blessed Peke,' said Posy.

'So is mine,' said Jenny.

'Isn't that wonderful?' cried Posy, and in the

sweet community of Peke owners they became as sisters.

* * * *

'We've got three visits to pay before we leave Ceylon,' I said to Jenny.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because I promised,' I replied, only too conscious of the feebleness of this reasoning.

'Oh, you and your promises,' said Jenny. 'You ruin your whole life with them. But of course you must do as you wish or you won't be on good terms with yourself, and then I shall suffer. But what are these obligations anyway?'

'Well,' I said. 'I promised a member of my club to look up his son; and I promised my sister to look up a cousin of ours who settled out here some years ago; and we both of us promised—don't you remember?—that chicken-farming grass-widow in Hampshire that should we ever be in Ceylon we would give her husband a call.'

'Do you mean to say you kept his name and address?' Jenny asked.

'Of course,' I said. 'It's here in my pocket-book.'

She made her gesture of impatient dismissal of the mechanical, the boring and the trite. 'How can you keep such things?' she added.

'That's not the question before the House,' I replied. 'The real question is, How can you go on tolerating such a machine-made man as myself?'

'Because I like you,' she said simply. 'Which visit shall we pay first?'

We decided to begin with the husband of the chicken-farmer, who, on inquiry, I found to be living on his tea plantation not far from Nurawa Eliya, which is to Colombo what the Highlands are to London or Maine to New York or, a closer parallel still, Simla to Delhi.

'If it's tea,' said Jenny, 'I don't mind so much, because I should like to see how tea is grown. Nothing could make me drink Ceylon tea if there was any China to be got; but to see what happens before the tea-pot is reached might be amusing. I've seen hop-pickers so often in Kent, and the people in the vineyards all round Bordeaux. I've even seen them pressing out the juice with their naked feet;

so it's high time I knew something about tea.'

Tea picking turned out to be a far more delicate operation than I had thought. But indeed I had not thought at all; any more than I had thought how coffee picking is done, or cocoa picking, or of the processes by which we get tapioca and macaroni, which I have always grouped together in my mind, although one of them, it appears, is the gift of God and the other of man. I took the preliminary stages, antecedent to the dining-room, for granted. But now that I have seen the little duskers with their baskets among the shrubs, removing at each visit only two or three tiny leaves from each, the letters T E A, which our motor trip in the southern counties convinced me form the most popular word in England, have assumed a new character. They not only are a promise of refreshment, but it will bring back visions of Ceylon.

The plantation was about two hours from Nurawa Eliya, high on the mountain slopes on a winding road up which our Mahomedan chauffeur whirled us at an incredible and terrifying speed, trusting to the combined efforts of Allah and Klaxon

to avert a collision at every bend. If any other car coming from the opposite direction had reached one of the bends at the same time as ourselves there would be no hand to inscribe these simple records; but although other cars advanced towards us, they did so only between the hairpins. Why this should be so, I cannot explain; but it seems that collisions in Ceylon are rare. Nor can Allah have all the praise, for many of the drivers are Hindoos with a far from Mahomedan deity, and many are English who look to the Jewish Jehovah for aid.

I have been enlarging on tea out of due order. I ought first to have said something about the tea-planter who, while agreeable enough, was not so visibly pleased to meet acquaintances with a message from his wife in far-away England as one might have expected.

'Poor girl!' he said. 'I'm afraid she's having a pretty thin time; but it's a blind alley we're in. I can't go to her because of the work here—just turning the corner, you know, and very unwise to leave things to underlings—and she can't come to me because of the kids. When they're old enough

to go to school it will be different.' And he sighed.

He was a good-looking man with a loose mouth and a big moustache, not, as Jenny would say, from the top drawer, but agreeable enough; although not quite, I thought, at his ease. As he spoke, my mind's eye made one of its miraculous lightning expeditions and I saw again the photograph on the mantelpiece of the house at Petersfield with its sprawling inscription 'To my darling girl.'

'So she's given up keeping chickens, has she?' he said, reverting to his wife. 'I dare say she told me, but her handwriting's so jolly difficult I'm afraid I miss half her news. They're revolting birds anyway. They do you harm too, I've always believed—they're so stupid, it's catching.'

After leaving the plantation, Jenny and I sank each into one of those veranda chairs which are inseparable from the European homes of Ceylon, while our host walked up and down. I was surprised that he did not ask us in to see the house.

"It's pleasant out here,' he said, 'isn't it? Good view.'

It certainly was a wonderful view, with Adam's

Peak, Ceylon's noblest mountain, climbing to the sky in the distance.

Suddenly a tiny mite burst through the bead curtain that hung over the door, uttering happy little cries, but, seeing strangers, paused, pondered, and then ran to take shelter behind one of our host's legs, round which it clasped its arms, peering at us from that security and flashing its teeth and the whites of its eyes.

He made an effort to disengage himself, saying something curt and commanding in Cingalese; but the child hung on. A moment later a young native woman, whom I took to be either a nurse or other kind of servant, rushed in and, grabbing her charge, bore it away.

'That's the worst of living in a place like this,' our host said, recovering his good temper: 'every one gets to know you and appropriate you. Even the little brats won't let me alone. These tea plantations are regular patriarchal colonies, you know. And now what would you like to drink?'

But he was so clearly wishing for our departure that we put his mind at rest by declining anything.

Jenny said nothing for a while after we drove away. Nor did I. But as it happened, we were both thinking the same thing.

'Did you notice that child?' she asked.

'What child?'

'The child that climbed up his leg.'

'Yes, what of it?'

'Wasn't it rather an odd colour?'

'It might have been darker,' I said.

'Where was the mother?' Jenny asked.

'I didn't see any mother,' I said.

'But you saw the girl who fetched it away?'

'Yes.'

Another long pause.

'Did Mr. What's-his-name say anything to you about going back to England?' Jenny asked.

'He said business was in such a difficult state he couldn't get away,' I replied. 'And that, of course, is what his wife told us, poor thing.'

'I suppose Englishmen in Ceylon must do something,' said Jenny. 'What,' she added, 'are you going to tell his wife when we get back to England?'

'I—oh, I hadn't thought of that,' I said. 'Is it

necessary that I have any further communication with her?'

'No,' said Jenny, 'it most emphatically isn't.'

* * * *

I forget our exact progress through the Spicy Isle, but I fancy that from Nuwara Eliya we drove to that amazing place, the buried city of Anuradhapura, which is now nothing but a few stones marking the splendours of the remote past; long green stretches beneath which lie vast ruins; and the huge dagobas or tombs of the mighty dead.

Colombo, the biggest town in Ceylon—indeed, there is no other worth mention—has a population under two hundred thousand. Will it be believed that in the second century before Christ, Anuradapura measured sixteen miles from north to south and east to west, and that in one street alone were eleven thousand houses? Something to brood upon as one loiters beneath the trees that shade its serene and deserted lawns.

It is significant that the first sign of this ecclesiastical hive which meets the eye is what now remains of the Brazen Palace built by King Dutugemunu to

shelter a legion of those Buddhist priests without whom he could not move. Many of its myriad pillars, crazily out of the perpendicular, still stand. This palace is conjectured to have been nine storeys high and to have contained a thousand rooms, in every one of which were Men of God. No matter who lived in the eleven thousand houses in this street or that, the priests came first. Vestiges of temples and monasteries confront one on every hand; and here and there a gigantic but benign statue of the Master, excavated from its centuries of sleep beneath the turf, has been set up beside the road.

Dutugemunu seems gradually to have allowed himself to be extinguished by the priests. He it was who provided the money and the labour, the stones and the bricks, while they reaped the harvest. It is as though all Rome's churches and seminaries having been razed, you were led about the Eternal City and told 'These are the ruins of St. Peter's; here was the Vatican; here was the Lateran; here was the church of the Jesuits,' and so forth. The area covered by these Buddhist institutions and the dis-

tances between each are much the same as in Rome. How enchanting must have been the sight of the yellow-robed priests moving sedately among the intervening trees—wherever the eye turned the same dignified figures, meditating, consulting.

A very pompous little guide fell to our lot. 'How much?' I asked. 'The fees fixed by Government,' he said, 'are three rupees; but . . .' He had his information pat enough, but stumbled over the long words and gradually, when describing the excavations, passed from 'They' to 'We' and from 'We' to 'I' until it seemed that not a stone had come to light but through the efforts of his single spade; while it was his unaided arms that set in position the reconstructed monastery porticos and removed the giant Buddhas from their hiding-places beneath the turf to be objects of veneration by the road-side. One of his phrases I find continually recurring to mind: 'According to my identity.' This scholar and that had advanced certain theories, but 'according to my identity' the case was thus.

The mighty Dutugemunu arrived at supreme power by slaying in single combat his rival the Ma-

labar King, Elala. In this famous duel the two monarchs seem to have been mounted each on an elephant: an unwieldy business. Dutugemunu fought like a gentleman, afterwards erecting over his adversary an honourable tomb which is still to be seen. As a ruler Dutugemunu was magnificent and paternal, but (as he himself admitted on his death-bed) too much under the thumb of the priesthood. Dying, he was much disturbed by reviewing his life; nor could he be consoled by reminders of the great ostentatious deeds he had done for his faith, such as the building of temples, dagobas and monasteries. Two little unadvertised benefactions, however, coming to his memory, he was comforted.

* * * *

We had redeemed one of my impulsive promises. Next I had to see the son of old Hansard of the club, and in his case, if he took after his father, there would be both hospitality and decorum. No dusky consolation; no leg-clingers.

To get to Hansard's plantation—also tea—we had to go to Kandy, which might be described as both the Mecca and Benares of Ceylon, for it is at

Kandy, in a gorgeous and elaborate temple, that Buddha's tooth is preserved and revered, and therefore it is at Kandy that the priests most congregate and to Kandy that pilgrims continually resort.

Although Buddha, the Buddha, born Gautama, son of Suddhodana, to whom five thousand years of spiritual power were allotted, is associated in many minds chiefly or solely with India, he is claimed as a sojourner by Ceylon. Three times he is said to have visited the island, on one occasion leaving a footprint on the rocky summit of Adam's Peak, which is visited and venerated by the pious at all times but especially so when the moon is full.

Buddha is assumed to have lived in the fifth and sixth century B. C., but it was not until 307 B. C. that Buddhism was formally adopted as the state religion of the island. The missionary was Mahinda, an Indian prince, who arrived by air, alighted on a peak of Mihintal, the mountain overlooking the buried city of Anuradhapura, caught the King as he was hunting and rapidly made him a convert. Eighteen years later a branch of the sacred Bo Tree, in meditation under which, in his retirement at

Uruwela, near Benares, Gautama had found the Light, was brought to Anuradhapura; and from this branch grew the present tree, whose life is so carefully guarded and whose leaves are so earnestly desired by the pilgrim. The history of this tree, which seems to be trustworthy, makes it the oldest in the world.

But although the Bo Tree of Anuradhapura has its myriad devotees, rich and poor—I watched a magnificent gentleman with his wife and child descend from a superb car to abase themselves before it—the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy is the centre of the island's religious fervour. The Tooth was not, however, lost here; nor was it 'lost' in the usual sense of that painful word at all. It was saved from the ashes at Gautama's cremation, and was brought to Ceylon concealed in the hair of a Kalinga princess, who deposited it in an abode of honour in one of the now buried cities.

From time to time, however, during civil warfear, it had to be hidden, and more than once it was captured and taken back to India, the last time by the Portuguese, who, being good Catholics, nat-

urally did not approve of it, and in the sixteenth century it was publicly burned by the Archbishop of Goa. If this is so, the tooth that now makes Kandy a religious capital is spurious; the gate of the Temple is not of ivory but horn. Let others decide.

It is the destiny of the idealists who found religions to be elbowed into the market-place by the materialists who make those religions going concerns, and the rabble that assembles outside the steps of the famous temple at Kandy helps little towards meditation upon the pure soul to whose glory it was built. This temple, whose sacred chambers are gained by a long flight of steps, is situated beside the lake which gives Kandy its temporal fame. At Anuradhapura we saw the earliest of these artificial sheets of water, or 'tanks' as they are unromantically called, dating from the fifth century B. C.; the lake at Kandy is a modern upstart, for it was made by the last King of Kandy, who was deposed by the British little more than a hundred years ago. In his island palace he secured himself against the assassins without whom no Oriental

ruler is complete; while on the smaller island was a pavilion in which such of his wives as were being more than commonly tiresome could be marooned.

Buddha's Tooth—the tooth of teeth—I may say at once is an incredibly inhuman relic, and if the Teacher were to be reconstructed by a Sir Richard Owen, he would on its evidence be a giant and a monster too. A much more desirable object for veneration in the Kandy temple is his crystal image. None the less I should like to be in Kandy in August during the festival known as the Perahera, for then the Tooth, human or inhuman, sacred or profane, is carried in state for the world's wonder. The Perahera, as described to us by a native, is a procession which, beginning in splendour, is elaborated until, on the night of the full moon, it reaches its height of magnificence, with no fewer than forty of the sacred elephants taking a part. It is on this last culminating night that the Tooth is displayed to all —not in its ordinary abode, but in its shrine on the back of the most venerable and august of the Temple elephants, which, covered with gold and jewels and colour, descends the steps with its sacred load

and, joining its companions, leads them—the priests, the devotees, the sightseers and the mob—through Kandy's seething streets. It is Carnival and Easter in one.

The Temple elephants are kept in a park some two miles from the town, and they can be seen every day, but only after lunch. If I could change the hour it would be to the forenoon, when the heat is less and one is not sleepy. They have their own attendants, men apart, whose fathers and grandfathers and remote ancestors all occupied similar posts and who speak the elephant tongue. You see the elephants bathing and frolicking, and certain special feats will be performed for a consideration—such as pulling out hairs from their ears, with which to form lucky rings, and uprooting trees.

The leisurely, lumbering, yet acute inhabitants of this park are interesting; but the elephants that one suddenly comes upon on the road, or sees at work in the clearings, are far more so. The first that we saw were building a sea wall somewhere between Colombo and Galle, on the south-west

coast. One end of a chain was fixed to one of the great blocks of granite which had been dumped on the sands, and the other to a thick pole about six inches in diameter and five feet long. This pole the elephant grasped in its teeth and then began to pull, slowly but surely dragging the block to the wall and, under directions from the mahout, pushing it into the required position. There was no sense of effort, and no sense of display, although one felt that the elephant was conscious of his ability and proud of it. No doubt he was concentrating as a labourer, but he was able none the less to keep one of his little eyes on us, to see if we were properly impressed. I shall never forget him.

I, personally, cannot get used to this gentle incredible mammoth, with his easy purposeful onset, his questing trunk, his vigilant gaze and his old, old dark grey baggy suit; and I shall never cease to regret the refusal of the chauffeur to drive by night from Anuradrapura, for fear of meeting 'rogue,' or of finding a company of harmless but undisturbable specimens sleeping on the roadway.

It was a risk we were more than willing to take; but the driver demurred; and as, during the next week, his second daughter was to marry, with ceremonial running to seven hundred rupees, I felt that, although I could insist, I ought not to. Another sacrifice to that eternal killjoy, consideration-for-others.

* * * *

The younger Hansard turned out to be a courtly and agreeable man, nearing middle age, richly bronzed beneath his topee and not at all like his father. His one-storied house perched high on a levelled space among the rock, was full of such English amenities as books and pictures and magazines and Tottenham Court Road furniture, together with such accessories as netting against the flies, and verandas with long chairs commanding views of illimitable blue hills. In the shade it was cool; on the sunny side it was burning, but electric fans and iced drinks tempered the attack. There was even a billiard room hung round with photographs of school and college cricket elevens, with our host traceably

maturing in them as he passed from year to year. He still played, he told me, and if I went to the Colombo ground on the following Monday I should find him in flannels against a visiting team from Madras.

But I am exalting the house above its occupants. The great surprise was not that my club friend should have a personable son, although I had no great hopes, but that there should be such an attractive hostess—and white at that.

A strange destiny this far-flung empire of ours reserves for some of its children. What Mrs. Hansard was brought up to be, I do not ask her; but she would have been perfectly in her own setting were she in a Surrey garden, with wash-leather gloves and a pair of seccateurs; or arranging those roses in a bowl of Waterford glass to stand on a Sheraton sideboard; or singing the hymn in the squire's pew; or pouring out tea for her guests in the shade of the tennis courts. For there was well-to-do English country life written all over her, as we say. And here she was, thousands of miles from Surrey, living on a ledge of

rock, among a black population, with almost no topics of conversation left but the quality of the little green leaf on which she lived and by which she was surrounded: a leaf which, for the first twenty-three years of her life, she had seen only in its black, dried and wrinkled state, never having given a moment's thought to its appearance on the shrub or whether that shrub was grown in China, Ceylon or on the slopes of the Himalayas. And now this leaf, an infusion of which refreshes, cheers but not inebriates, was the basis of her existence. There was nothing but tea for miles and miles; all these little dark figures, men and women, boys and girls, carrying odd baskets and stooping among the bushes, had but one purpose: to pick the leaves; that great factory a hundred yards from the house had been built for no other purpose than to prepare those leaves for the market; everything in the house was paid for by tea.

Meanwhile she was an exile and a very remote one. If she wanted to meet any women of her own caste and colour she must take the car and drive it to Kandy, and then drive it back; and in

the cold and rainy season this could not be a very agreeable enterprise. Even on this hot day of early February there were occasional chilly breezes from the peaks, and the frequency with which the road was built over a water course told what a land of torrents and cascades it must be when the heavens opened in earnest.

But, like a true British colonist's wife, Mrs. Hansard made the best of it, and, if she grumbled, did so with a laugh. Fortunately she and her husband seemed to be on the best of terms, and I thought with a grim smile of the condition of the place had it chanced that Vivian, instead of taking to music, had taken to tea, and had brought his Hermione to a lodge in such a wilderness.

'If you'd given notice of your coming,' said Hansard, 'we would have had some elephants for you. There's a bit of forest down there that I've been planning to clear for a long while, and you would have enjoyed watching them at it. There's a fellow with a team of elephants who does all the clearing round here. It's amazing how clever they are. The last time he came he marked with

a red cross a number of trees that were to be pulled up; those and those only. At first the mahout directed the proceedings; but after a while he dismounted, whispered his instructions into the elephant's ear and left him to finish it alone; which he did, carefully examining the trees for the red cross, dealing with them, and interfering with none of the others. After watching an elephant at work for a little while one can believe anything of them.'

The anecdote made me still more to wonder why elephants are not employed to perform similar tasks at home. If they can subsist for years in our climate in travelling circuses, England is obviously a country fit for elephants to live in, and they could be imported, not only to carry out heavy operations, but to gladden the sight and make the heart to beat faster.

'But as there aren't any elephants,' said Mrs. Hansard, 'we can show you something else, can't we, Bill? Not so big, but pretty good in their own way. They ought to be awake now.'

And in a minute or so she came back leading

a little boy and a little girl, about six and seven, who clung shyly to their mother and looked at us out of great blue eyes.

It is possible that Hansard's father, between denunciations of the Government and imprecations against the methods of Income Tax collection, had mentioned his son's family; but I had forgotten, and therefore these two delicate fair-haired creatures were an additional surprise.

Although never unprovided with a repeating watch for the purpose of subjugating or disarming children, I meet them so seldom that they are always something of an event; particularly so in this unbelievable island of torrid heat, dark skins, yellow-robed priests, gigantic tuskers and tea.

They were not remarkable children; they said nothing original or amusing; but out there in that foreign island, where every face was black except a few adult whites', some of which were far too red, there was something unreal and ethereal and fascinating and even enchanting about them and I was thrilled merely to be with them and hear their gay young voices.

'Well,' I said to Jenny as we drove off, 'that looks like a happy married couple anyway. It's odd to have to come so far to find one. Is distance from London a necessary ingredient do you think?'

'No,' said Jenny, 'but possibly the children are, and the worst of it is that they're under sentence.'

'How?' I asked, 'are they consumptive?'

'No,' she said. 'But they've got to go to England. Just like the chicken-farmer's, only in this case they're going to their grandparents and Mrs. Hansard will come straight back. That's what grandparents are for.'

'And will Mrs. Hansard like giving them up?' I asked.

'Not a bit,' she said. 'But it's the Anglo-Indian parents' fate.'

'I don't believe I shall ever like tea again,' I said.

* * * *

We should have stayed longer in Kandy had it been a less devotional spot; but the cult of the

Tooth, even when there are no Perahera processions, carries with it so much restlessness and noise, prolonged so far into the night, that we were worn out. I am sure that Buddha himself was on the side of quietude; otherwise how could he have sat for so long meditating in the deer park? But between that deer park and the shores of the lake at Kandy a very wide gulf is fixed.

We left Kandy, none the less, with regret because we met there a very charming old man.

All the Cingalese whose employment brings them into a helpful relation to the foreigner struck me as being kindly and thoughtful and hospitably bent; while it is flattering, particularly to those who do not much assert themselves and are conscious that their merits are too often unappreciated, to be called Master. Would Master like this? What would Master eat next? and so forth: all very soothing and gratifying. But the nicest of them all was the old gardener or guide—wrinkled and smiling, with a ragged white beard—in the Kandy Botanical Gardens, who led us from flower

to flower and tree to tree and, in his gentle voice, with an admirable choice of words, described their properties.

He showed us the cinnamon tree, the all-spice, the bay-rum, the nutmeg, in each case accompanying his discourse by a practical demonstration. The principal occupation of the attendants at Kew, if I remember aright, is to prevent anything being picked; but this dear old gentleman picked everything, even blossoms from that sumptuous flowering tree, the Lady Amherst. If true enthusiasm constitutes true ownership, the Gardens, of course, were his, and the Kandy Town Councillors, or whatever body nominally possess them, mere interlopers.

One searching grief he had: the flying foxes. He pointed to the tree-tops where by day they hang in their hundreds, and said sadly that no effort to exterminate or dislodge them has succeeded. Every morning many of them were shot, but the numbers did not seem to decrease. Having something more than tolerance for these uncanny creatures, whose spreading silent wings

make the Eastern nights so mysterious and unreal, I asked him why the feud went on. Because, he said, of the damage they do, destroying both trees and flowers. He shook his old head at the dilemma, and I had nothing better to suggest than the importation of flying fox-hounds.

* * * *

It was on leaving Kandy that we paid the last of the promised visits. To my cousin. My cousin was not in tea but rubber; that is all I knew of him, except that he was a little younger than I. I did not even know if he was married or single.

'Lionel,' said Jenny, 'tells me that you are going to regret this visit.'

The drive, however, was perfect. It was hot but not too hot; we saw monkeys in the trees; an iguana crossed the road; and the flowers in the hedges were as rich and beautiful as those we grow at home in conservatories. Particularly gorgeous was the Ceylon orchid, as it is called, a flame of scarlet and yellow, as common there as blackthorn is with us.

Arrived at the plantation, I left Jenny in the

car and approached the house on foot. After all, its owner was my cousin, not hers.

I am glad I did so, for when he came to the door I was at once conscious that the rigours and griefs of exile were being tempered for him by what may be called Dutch fortitude. And it was still early in the morning.

Supporting himself by the back of a chair, he drew a letter from his pocket and did his best to focus it. But for this letter he might have been unbearably sentimental; as it was, it saved me I know not what revelations and even tears, for it was from a firm dealing in those metal cups which are fixed to the rubber trees to catch the oozing juice on its way to help motorists to ride smoothly and artists to remove defective pencil strokes.

Their traveller, said the letter, would have the honour of calling on my cousin in the course of a day or so, to solicit his esteemed orders.

He read it and looked at me, re-read it and looked at me, and drew the only inference possible.

'Pleased to see you and all that,' he said, 'but

we always go to the same firm. Sorry, old man, but come in and have a spot anyway.'

Then noticing the car, he stumbled towards Jenny.

'Sorry there's nothing doing with your old man,' he said, 'but come in and have a spot too. Always pleased to see a lady. They're scarce here. It's very disappointing for the old man not to get an order. I'm sorry. But we always go to the same firm. Nice people. Shouldn't like to leave them.'

Jenny declined, much to his disappointment and even dismay, but I went indoors for a minute or so to make a foolish effort to establish my identity. After all, I should have to report to my sister, who had given me the commission.

'Haven't you had enough, Hubert?' I said as he reached for the whisky bottle.

'Hubert?' he replied in surprise. 'How did you know my name was Hubert? Very matey, of course, to address me like that; very friendly; but how did you know it? Don't think I object. Not a bit. Very matey. But it wouldn't make any differ-

ence to the order, you know, for me to call you by your Christian name, even if I knew it; you mustn't expect that. Stick to old friends—that's my motto.'

'You don't remember me,' I said, 'but you often spent your holidays with us. Don't you remember your Uncle James and Aunt Matilda? The house at Aylesbury?'

'Good Heavens!' he exclaimed, 'of course I do. But which one are you?'

'I'm Richard,' I said.

'Richard? So you're Richard. Yes, I can see you are now.'

He leaned affectionately against me.

'Have a spot on it,' he added. 'This meeting is wonderful!' And he took a long pull. 'This calls for celebration. We must get your wife in. Nice woman, that, Richard. I must call you Richard, mustn't I? Distinguished too. I'm not very fond of women, but I like those I like. The bore is, there's so many of the other sort. I'll fetch her.'

'No,' I said, 'don't worry. I can't stay.'

'But of course she must come in,' he said. 'All

cousins, you know, Dick. Do you mind my calling you Dick?'

'Call me what you like,' I said. 'But I've got to move along.'

'I couldn't let you go without being friendly to your wife,' he said. 'That would be disgraceful. A very hospitable country, Ceylon, Dicky.'

'She's not my wife,' I said. 'That lady is a friend. I'm not married.'

'Not married? Quite right, old boy. Quite right, Richard. Don't marry 'em. I never do. Friends are best. But if she's your friend, she must be mine, too. All friends together. England, home and beauty. I'll bring her in.'

'No,' I said, 'please don't,' and I pushed him into a chair. 'She's not very well. She ought to get out of the car as seldom as possible.'

'Have it your own way,' he said, 'but you make me look and feel very inhospitable. Not like me at all, to let beautiful distinguished lady sit outside. Your friend too. Dicky's friend.'

He finished his glass.

'But what beats me,' he said, 'is why you went

into the bagman line. The last I heard of you, you were a scholar, an author, something clever anyway. And now here you are, on the road for a firm of iron-mongers. Very strange. Incomprehensible.'

'But I'm not,' I said. 'I'm just an ordinary traveller.'

'Yes,' he replied. 'So I see. And I can't understand it. And for that firm too. Not a good firm, Richard; second rate. That's why I won't change. Not even for you. Blood's thicker than water, and all that, but I can't change. I'm sorry.'

He rose with great difficulty and extended a shaking hand.

'You must explain to your people,' he said, 'why I can't give them an order. Break it as nicely as you can, and if you take my advice you'll get a job with a better house. Let me give you a letter of introduction to my own suppliers. Anything I tell them, goes. They know me. I'll say you're my cousin, but we won't let them know anything about having given up cleverness and come down in the world. Just wait here while I go and write it.'

And he stumbled from the room.

With surer feet I made instantly for the front door, sprang into the car and bade the chauffeur hurry.

'Well,' I said as a bend in the road made it no longer necessary to look fearfully back in dread of pursuit, 'that's that. No more hunting up long lost relations for me. Chasse défendue, as they say in France.'

'I was against you making the experiment at all,' said Jenny. 'So was Lionel.'

'I know,' I said. 'I ought to have taken your advice. I always should,' and I recounted my adventures.

'Every one has a drunken cousin,' said Jenny, when I had finished, 'but there's no need to look them up. I don't suppose you gave him any more pleasure than he gave you. You were too sober. The next time he meets his friends he'll probably be very funny about the commercial traveller who turned out to be a stuffy relation from England and didn't wait for the letter of introduction.'

'What I shall always regret,' I said, 'is that I can't be present at the interview when the real

bagman arrives and my poor Hubert has to rearrange his ideas. His face would be a sight worth watching.'

* * * *

One of the letters awaiting us at the Galle Face on our return from Kandy bore a Los Angeles postmark and had been forwarded from London.

DEAR UNCLE RICHARD,

You probably were surprised to see the postmark on the envelope of this letter before you opened it—that is if you are one of the people who look at postmarks first. And then you said to yourself, "Who on earth is it from, for thank Heaven I don't know any one mixed up with the pictures?"

But don't you? The joke is that you do know some one, because I have gone in for them and am doing quite well.

You will remember that I told you that if I didn't go on with my painting and if I didn't take a job in London I still had something up my sleeve? Well, that something was Hollywood. I had been to so many talkies with nothing but American voices in them, and had heard so much about English voices being wanted, that I thought I would try, because people have always said that I have rather a nice voice and at school I was president of the Dramatic Society during my last year, although the stage itself never

appealed to me. But now that I was up against things the thought of the movies seemed like an inspiration.

I didn't waste a moment. I sold enough jewellery to get the money, took my passage and arrived in this amazing place without knowing a soul, and with just one letter of introduction. But that letter, which a friend of mine at the Old Vic gave me, made all the difference, for it was to an English actor out here who was sufficiently in with the people he was working for to get me a personal interview with the boss—a personal interview with the boss being much more difficult to obtain than anything else in the world. Rich men and needle's eyes aren't in it.

I seemed to please the Big Noise, or at any rate I didn't displease him, and I was tried out and found satisfactory, and I am now paid fifty dollars a week to do what I'm told, with a promise of much more when I get better parts. Isn't that wonderful?

More, however, is to come, for my news has only just begun. I had not been in Los Angeles more than a fortnight when who should I see coming towards me in the street but Vivian. I thought at first he must be dead and I was seeing his ghost, particularly as he looked so thin and pale; and he thought the same of me; so there we stood with our mouths open, unable to move, holding up the sidewalk.

When at last he was sure it was me, he broke down, poor old thing, and began to cry. He had no idea I was there; he had come out, just as I did, hoping for work, but without any letter of introduction and without any luck. No one wanted his own music, and he's not so base

as to get as near as he can to other people's, and so he was down and out, hating his failure, homesick, and possibly once again a little wanting me.

It was very pathetic because he was afraid to ask me any questions for fear that I had gone out there with somebody else, or had made a new friendship while I was there—you know what Hollywood's reputation is—because in that case all the hope which I could see had suddenly sprung up in him would be dashed to the ground.

Well, the long and short of it is that he is devoted to me again. I was able to get him some work and we live in a very modest way in a very big hotel surrounded by bell-hops—and that's all. Of course I had to tell you as soon as possible, because I know this is what you wanted to happen. The only other thing to say is that if you see a talkie announced called *Go to it!*, go to it. You will find me in it. But it may not be released for ever so long, and it may even be scrapped, they are so wantonly extravagant and reckless here.

Your loving
HERMIONE.

* * * *

Jenny, you may remember, had insisted on palm trees and she was not disappointed. There may be sounder, bigger, more splendid trees—such as the teak tree with its trunk of iron, the gold mohur with its dropping flame—but the King of the island is the coco-nut palm. There

may be bananas, there may be tea, there may be rubber and there may be rice, and, of course, there is the jungle, but never for long is the coco-nut palm an exile. It breaks in everywhere, always gay, always friendly, its lustrous leaves catching, holding and flinging back the sun. Always radiant and beautiful, it is never more so than when cresting an eminence and waving in the breeze.

Ceylon is an island of many waters. There are its rivers, muddy after heavy rain, which often break out into rapids and in which elephants lie in paradisial sloth and drivers bathe both themselves and their bullocks, pouring the water from a pail solicitously over the little, patient animals. There are the mountain streams tumbling in waterfalls over the grey rocks beside the road and escaping under it to splash riotously again on their way to the valley. Under these cascades you find wayside bathers, refreshing themselves for the next few burning miles. There are the great natural shallow lakes, with turtles at their edges and white cranes alert for fish or frogs. There are the great artificial tanks made by the old kings, where

flocks of water-fowl rise up and you notice black excrescences on the surface which might be pieces of wood but are really crocodiles' snouts. There are the irrigation channels for the rice fields, some of them under water, some of them squares of vivid green, and some of them mere soft mud being re-puddled by teams of water-buffaloes. There are the grassy pools beside the road where these same slate-coloured ruminants take their siesta, and lastly there are the constructed baths, each with its bucket, for passers-by who feel drier than is good for them.

It was, perhaps, not a little because of the chauffeur's timidities that I am sceptical as to the jungle. There are other reasons too, for how can a jungle harbour man-eating and carnivorous creatures when, in the most remote districts, unattended cows are tethered? Wild elephants, whether orderly or 'rogues,' were denied me and I saw no traces of the cheetah which for some days and night had, it was said, been terrorizing the country around Anuradhapura. The only signs of this formidable cat were the stuffed heads of

four of them which the keeper of the rest-house at Sigiriya exhibited for sale. Not counting monkeys, mongooses and deer, which strike one as hardly wild, the only essentially jungle animal that I saw was a jackal.

Now and then one comes upon the wild beasts of Ceylon in captivity. There is an estate between Colombo and Kandy where, beside the road, you see caged leopards and pythons; and again, in the hotel grounds at Anuradhapura, I found a forlorn leopard with abysms of longing in its eyes, and in a wired packing-case a coiled mass which I was told was a python. When carefully managed Zoological Gardens collect their levy on the jungle we may not be too happy, but we recognize the reason. But for wild creatures to be captured and held behind bars capriciously within a few yards of their own domain—this seems to me to be wrong and senseless; and had I the tools I should have enjoyed running the risk of setting them free. It was, by the way, at the Anuradhapura hotel that I was kept awake, not by the roaring of hungry carnivoræ, but by the yapping

or barking of lizards. I had noticed them running about the walls as I went to bed. We saw no swarm of butterflies, but often, where there were open spaces of turf or swamp, there must have been thousands on view at once. Mostly white and yellow. Now and then the larger ones, as big as birds, flutter and dart. All must, I should guess, be difficult to catch, so much stronger and more erratic is their flight than that of our home varieties. The swarms when they advance in solid formation are on their way to Adam's Peak to do reverence to Buddha's footprint.

Of other birds than the crow we saw disappointingly few: one very large hawk, large enough to be an eagle; many cranes, and a water bird which, grey when it perches, is white on the wing; and little birds, greenish blue, with pointed bills, which I assumed to be a species of fly-catcher. But the kingfisher, though infrequent, atoned, as ever, for all. One variety, blue and red, larger than our own but very like, crossed the line of vision several times; but another and rarer, who came but

once yet will never be forgotten, was wholly of brilliant burning azure, and he flew away from me as a gentleman should, a straight line against a background of dark green and grey mountains, until lost to sight. I think that blue bird was the most beautiful thing I saw in all Ceylon. An assurance that I could find it, somewhere, at a given hour, flying not across but away from me, as a gentleman should, would make me cheerfully again face those five thousand miles of tedious waters and all the languorous fatigues of the Arabian Sea.

* * * *

'This is too far south for me,' said Jenny one morning. 'It's all very beautiful, but it's too rich, too lucious, too overladen. I belong to the north: the Mas St. Antoine is as near the Equator as I ought ever to be. It must be very lovely there just now, Richard, with the early spring breaking through.'

'Not so lovely as England,' I said, 'with the scent of white violets and moss in the air, and

lambs bleating, and rooks in debate, and the buds thickening against the sky.'

'Don't, Richard,' said Jenny, 'you're making me cry.'

'I'm a little emotional myself,' I admitted. 'February can be almost too tender now and then.'

'Well,' I resumed, 'whether we spend this early spring in France or England, there is only one duty in front of me at the moment, and that is to visit the steamer office.'

I may be stupid, but I can read the writing on the wall: I know when it's time to go.

'Dear Richard,' said Jenny, 'you don't mind very much?'

'I want to do what you like,' I said.

'I'm almost well now,' she said. 'After the voyage back I shall be quite well. We'll get off the boat at Marseilles and hire a car and be at the villa in about six hours. And after a few weeks,' she said, 'we'll go home. That will be about mid April.'

'I should like to see one more primrose,' I said.

'Wallflowers in the sun!' said Jenny.

'The first leaves on a sweetbriar are the best,' I said.

'The thrush in the early morning,' said Jenny.

'I should like to find one more thrush's nest,' I said. 'The blue of the eggs: always almost a magical thrill.'

'The blackbird in the evening,' said Jenny.

'An April shower,' I murmured.

'Do hurry to the office,' said Jenny. 'There's not a moment to lose.'

I hurried. That is to say, the chauffeur did. But it was not to make reservations, as Jenny supposed, but to decide on which of a variety of reservations I would take up, for if Ceylon had not suited her we should have left it long ago, and I had made every preparation for an impulse. That is one of the advantages of winning a big lottery prize: impulses can be gratified.

* * * *

One of the few of her letters that Jenny opened —she had a way of twisting them about and peering at the corners and then throwing them into a drawer, not so much for future reference as for

oblivion—one of the few which she read caused her to utter a little cry.

'Look!' she said, holding it out to me; 'Jack's dead.'

'No?' I exclaimed.

'Yes. The lawyer says so. A month ago. How considerate of Jack to die then, when I was far away! He had some very nice ways. Well, that's over and now I can marry you.'

'Jenny,' I said, 'let me say again that I don't want to marry. If I did marry any one, it would be you, but I don't want to marry. I don't want.'

'You'll change your mind,' she said. 'How lucky to have missed that funeral! Not that I should have gone. Poor Jack, he was a very trying man.'

'We all are,' I said. 'I am, or should be. Let me repeat for the thousandth time that I think our marriage would be a mistake. Why change? We're very happy as we are. Why run the risk of quarrelling? I'm not a discourteous brute, but I'm quite sure I should be less likely to lose my temper

with you and say impulsive things if you were a friend and neighbour than if you were a wife. Wives automatically irritate.'

'I should like to make you angry now and then,' said Jenny.

'There's no doubt but what you would,' I said. 'You often say and do things now which make me angry but which, as one outside the family, I accept silently. Coming from my wife I should find them provocative of the most caustic criticism. Wives are like that. How does the proverb go: "The woman you admire may steal a horse, but a wife mayn't even look over the hedge."'

'You and your proverbs!' said Jenny. 'I should like to marry you, I say. Besides I'm getting on. I shall need your arm soon.'

'You can have it at any time,' I replied.

'Yes, as a courtly acquaintance.'

'Candover is such a pretty name,' I said. 'Much prettier than mine. And you'd lose it.'

'Is that your only objection?' she asked.

'No,' I said. 'That's the least of them. There are thousands more.'

'But, Richard, think how nice it would be to be bound together,' said Jenny; 'all old and comfortable and independent of the tiresome young. Towards the sunset, Richard.'

'Yes,' I said, 'that's what we're going to be. But don't let's marry. I've set my heart on entering the friendly crematorium a free man.'

'I should like to marry you, Richard,' said Jenny.

THE END

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